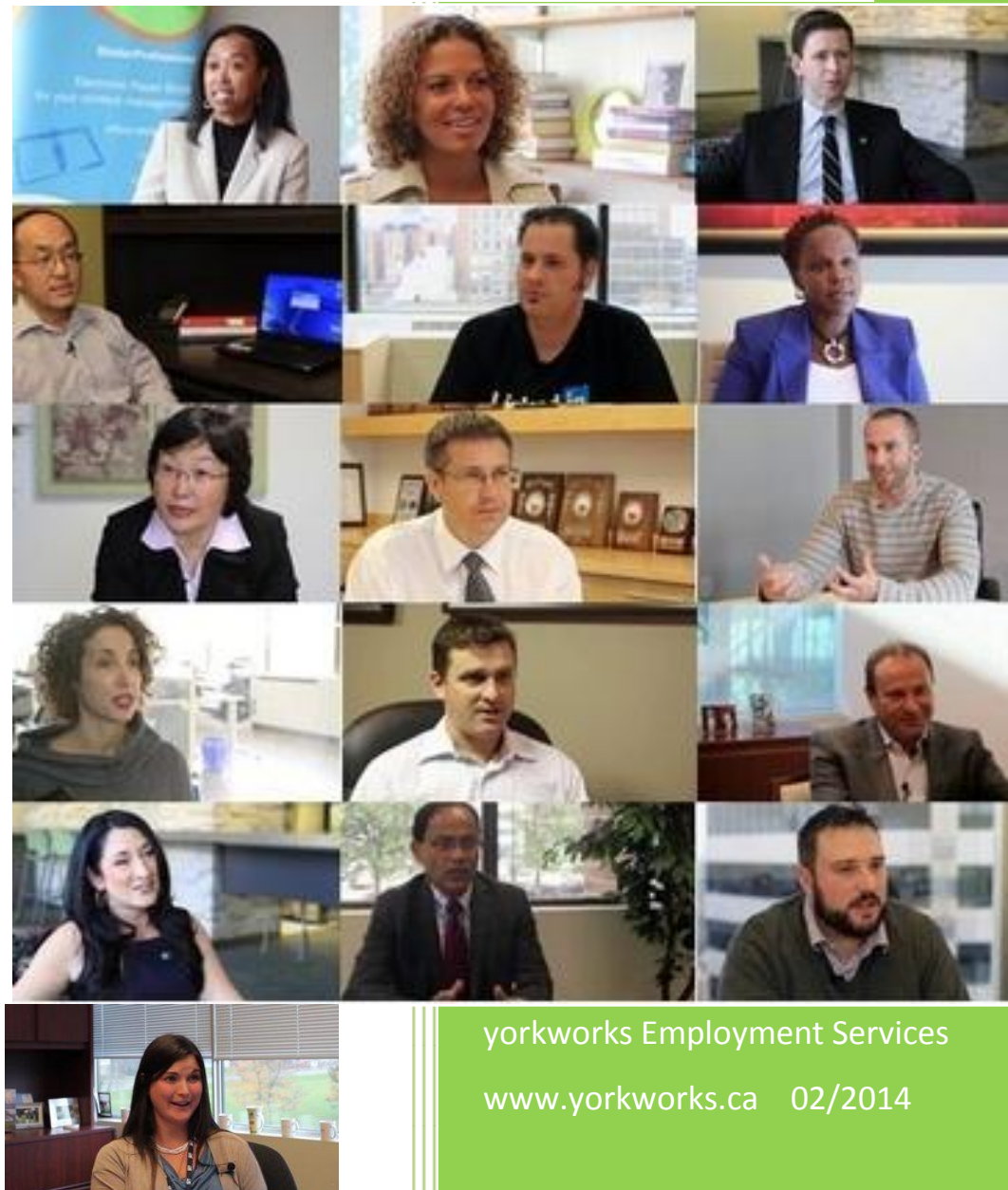


16 Experts on Employee Engagement and Retention



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About yorkworks' Employee Engagement and Retention Project

Our experts include a mix of Human Resource Professionals, Executives, Business Owners, Subject Matter Experts and Educators. They discuss the importance of engaging and retaining employees, articulating your brand and culture, and why transparency matters.

Yorkworks' employee engagement and retention project, called KEEP (Keeping Employees through Employer Practices) was funded by the Ontario Government and highlighted the best Human Resource practices for keeping and engaging employees. The tips and strategies shared by award-winning organizations known for their exemplary retention techniques have been compiled into a series of short and informative training videos on www.yorkworks.ca that are resource for small and/or emerging companies. These resources are offered through the Employment Ontario network free of charge to any employer who wants to improve their ability to retain good employees.

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Thank You to Presenters

- **Marie-Hélène Budworth, Associate Professor of Human Resource Management, York University**
- **John Cardella, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Ceridian Canada**
- **Rob Catalano, Vice President, Marketing, Achievers Corporation**
- **Rob Chaggares, Partner, Chaggares and Bonhomme, Chartered Accountants**
- **Shane Creamer, AVP, Talent Acquisition TD Bank Group**
- **Val D'sa, Manager, Administration, Compensation and Benefits, York Region District School Board**
- **Jennifer Hobbs, Human Resources Manager, Strategic Information Technology**
- **Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto**
- **Meghan Livingstone, HR Relationship Manager, TD Bank Group**
- **Kirk Merrett, Director, Human Resources and General Affairs, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Canada (previous role)**
- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**
- **Perry Monaco, Strategic Product Consultant, LinkedIn**
- **Debbie Russell, Human Resources Consultant, RBRO Solutions**
- **Dennis Tao, Interim Executive**
- **Laura Williams, Lawyer and Principal, Williams HR Law Professional Corporation**
- **Caroline Yang, Partner and Human Resources Consultant, MultiCultural Business Solutions**

Transcripts

Video 01 - Invest in the Best

1. John Cardella, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Ceridian Canada
2. Rob Chaggares, Partner, Chaggares and Bonhomme, Chartered Accountants
3. Jennifer Hobbs, Human Resources Manager, Strategic Information Technology
4. Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto

John Cardella

Attracting and keeping the right people

It really comes down to a couple of things. Cost and customer satisfaction. Our view is that turnover can cost an employer or small business up to 1.5 to 2 times that person's salary. So it's very important that when you attract the right people (because you do spend a lot of time trying to get the right people in the door) that you keep them.

Rob Chaggares

An employer's greatest asset

For every business, and especially for services; whether its accountants or other professional services, your employees are all that you have. They're the assets. The desks, the computers, they're worth nothing, really; it's the people that your clients are interacting with.

One of the worst things that we could have for our business model is to have high employee turnover. If we have that, our clients will have no continuity on their files, they won't know who to talk to, and it becomes a negative environment for whatever the reason the turnover is. So the key for us is that we do everything we can to train employees; to make sure they're going to be able to progress in a way that they're happy and in a way that we're happy and comfortable.

Jennifer Hobbs

The real cost of losing employees

It costs a lot of money to lose employees. Even if it's a short term employee, the amount of effort and time that goes into training them, orienting them, mentoring them is significant.

Our clients get to know this person. When they go, we have to retrain somebody else; we have to re-mentor somebody else; our client has to work with somebody new. It affects not only bottom dollar, but morale with the team. That human capital that somebody has in them, that's irreplaceable. You can't replace everything that they know.

Lisa Kimmel

Investing in employee engagement

Job retention is incredibly important because it costs a lot of money to hire new people and to train them and to get them up to speed, particularly in such a fast paced environment as ours.

Therefore, we invest a significant amount of time in employee engagement so that we don't have to constantly be recruiting – unless it's because we're experiencing growth and it's about adding to our existing headcount.

Video 02 Retention Benefits

- **Kirk Merrett, Director, Human Resources and General Affairs, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Canada (previous role)**
- **Marie-Hélène Budworth, Associate Professor of Human Resource Management, York University**
- **Debbie Russell, Human Resources Consultant, RBRO Solutions**

Kirk Merrett

Retaining solid contributors

There is a dollar impact of course, in the cost of hiring somebody. There is a dollar cost and there is a loss of productivity while you're replacing that person, and during the recruiting time and then as they get ramped up and they learn the job.

You are potentially losing somebody that is a fit, a real contributor to the organization. It's not just substituting widget A for widget B – that's not the case, when you're talking about people of course. If you've got somebody good who is a solid contributor to your organization, you do want to retain them; you don't want to risk having to replace them later with somebody who is not as committed.

Marie-Hélène Budworth

The power of knowledge holders

There is a need to have a core workforce that is engaged and committed and happy to be there. There is actually a lot of research on the power of knowledge holders within the organization; knowledge brokers, people within the organization who hold the keys to what makes this organization work.

Things that aren't necessarily explicit; things that one can't write down in a manual and hand it to someone, but things we know because we've been in this place for a while now and we know that "this is the way things work here". Holding onto that knowledge is something that can be done by holding onto those key people within the organization.

It's also important to hold onto employees simply because it makes the functioning of business easier, from a logistical standpoint, to have continuity. To not be in this constant recruitment/hiring cycle which is a really expensive process because of the time it takes within HR. Also to be able to build effective workgroups, teams that understand each other, that know each other, that have some experience together.

Debbie Russell

Building a stable base for clients

Job retention is important to any company and particularly so at RBRO Solutions because you want to reduce turnover so that it does not impact productivity. We are churning out products; we are meeting client expectations, needs and demands all the time. You want to have a continuous, stable employee base that your clients are interacting with on an ongoing basis.

Turnover reduces productivity and it reduces the overall workflow efficiency. You really want to retain employees so that you can maintain your productivity, your workflow efficiency and move your organization forward.

Video 03 Hire Right

- **Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto**
- **Caroline Yang, Partner and Human Resources Consultant, MultiCultural Business Solutions**
- **Rob Chaggares, Partner, Chaggares and Bonhomme, Chartered Accountants**

Lisa Kimmel

On employees as ambassadors

One of the things that has been critically important to us has been recognizing that our current employees are our biggest brand advocates and ambassadors, and we really need to ensure that they are equipped with what they need help with to tell, the Edelman story. We actively encourage our employees to talk about their work experience at Edelman, and to identify those people who are in the industry, whom they think would be excellent employees at Edelman.

Caroline Yang

Good job descriptions

Have good job descriptions. Really think through what you need, and who you're going to hire. What are those "must have" qualifications and what are the "nice to have" skills and experience? If you are a small business and you need people to be flexible – say that, because you may not be able to write down every task the person is going to perform. However, you still want to communicate your expectations through your job descriptions.

Rob Chaggares

The hiring process

One of the hardest things nowadays, in the economy that we have, is that every potential job seeker is really well educated on how to make their resumes look perfect and how to look like the perfect candidate. For employers, it's very difficult to sift through.

The first thing is to set very specific criteria for the job that you're hiring for and to try and find the level of position you're looking for. With the growth we've had, we've had to hire and unfortunately let go of a few people over the years. I guess the biggest thing that we've had success with, is, we've started to test some of the people that we've hired. We bring them in and have one or even two interviews, and then administer an aptitude test that we've developed for bookkeepers and accountants.

Caroline Yang

Sourcing candidates from non-traditional talent pools

Where do you look? Nowadays there are so many job boards and there are so many tools; technology tools.

If you are recruiting for some hard-to-recruit skill sets, you might want to go out of that traditional talent pool. You maybe want to go to professional associations, and if they have an internationally educated professionals program, then you can expand your candidate pool that way.

Work your system and work your process, so that you can describe your job clearly to the prospective candidate. Expand your talent pool and go look at the “unusual” places and you may find yourself some very good candidates there.

Video 04 Employee Retention

- **Dennis Tao, Interim Executive**
- **Caroline Yang, Partner and Human Resources Consultant, MultiCultural Business Solutions**
- **Debbie Russell, Human Resources Consultant, RBRO Solutions**
- **Laura Williams, Lawyer and Principal, Williams HR Law Professional Corporation**
- **Kirk Merrett, Director, Human Resources and General Affairs, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Canada (previous role)**

Dennis Tao

Providing employees with opportunities to use their skills

The first thing is, you have to make sure that you are giving employees enough responsibility so that they feel like they're being challenged every day. There's nothing worse for an employee than coming to work and sitting there and not feeling good about what they are doing and not using their skills.

Sometimes managers are hesitant to give people more, or allow them to stretch their abilities and challenge their skills. I think your best way is to provide your people with as much opportunity for them to utilize their skills as much as they can.

Caroline Yang

Communicating expectations and reviewing performance

I believe that most employees want to do a good job. For an employer to really help to set employees up for success is to communicate what the expectations are.

Many organizations may have a performance management system process where they do performance reviews. I would really encourage companies and managers to use that. It's not a form and it's not a binder that hides somewhere on your desk collecting dust. It's not an HR thing; it's your tool, between you and the employee.

Use that; have a good conversation, and push that conversation at the beginning of the relationship. Communicate expectations and be specific. Along the way, give people very tangible feedback. Once you help the employee to feel comfortable about what is expected from them and they feel that they are doing a good job; it's very likely that they are going to stay.

Debbie Russell

Hiring and promoting from within

We have a long learning curve when people join our organization; learning about the variety of software products that we have. So we want to hire from within; we want to promote people to move within our organization.

We do have annual performance reviews where employees can share their thoughts about where they see themselves going in the future with the company, where they want to see their job going, how they want to see their job grow, and just annually looking at it in a formalized way.

Laura Williams

Allowing people to work within their own styles and competencies

One of the key things is creating a culture and environment where people feel that they can grow to their fullest potential. That starts with making sure you hire the right people. As we're a smaller firm, that means that in terms of my leadership style, I don't have any interest in micromanaging individuals.

I want our employees to understand what the end product is in terms of our client service, and allow them to go about it in their own style. I think that when you allow people to work within their own styles and competencies, and they're given an opportunity to show you what they know, and to do their best and be their best, that goes a long way to achieving engagement in the workplace.

Video 05 Employee Engagement

- **Kirk Merrett, Director, Human Resources and General Affairs, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Canada (previous role)**
- **Dennis Tao, Interim Executive**
- **Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto**

Kirk Merrett

Engagement and initiative

We look at engagement not as employee satisfaction. It used to be, you measured employee satisfaction and that told you what's going to keep employees in their jobs. Engagement takes that to another level. Engagement is defined as when the employee wants to see the company succeed and will put extra effort towards that.

Dennis Tao

Investing skills and talents

If you have someone who's not engaged, they're going to do the bare minimum. If you have somebody who's engaged, they're going to come to you and say "I've got this great idea", or "I volunteer to do this" as opposed to if they're not engaged, being less likely to invest their skills and talents with you.

Lisa Kimmel

On employee involvement in the planning process

For the last several years we have involved employees in co-creating all of our employee engagement initiatives. What I do is facilitate brainstorming sessions with all of the levels within the organization, to get feedback and suggestions and ideas on the things that are important – the initiatives that they want to put in place. Then we develop an annual employee engagement plan. The employees have bought into it because they have helped to co-create it.

Dennis Tao

On employee dedication

Employees who are engaged tend to be very motivated to get the job done. Some will say, "it's important to me, it's important to my organization, and I believe in what I do".

Kirk Merrett

Ownership of the job

As part of our engagement program, we have a number of components. We've been very up-front in saying "this year...these are the targets that we're going for". In our case, they involve sales, profit and customer service. That's one key component to engagement.

The next part of that is accountability, and giving people ownership of their jobs and their tasks. That can be assigning ownership of a project, or even as simple as a basic task that they need to do every day. The ownership piece is crucial in any organization. We've been successful because people have taken that ownership and run with it, and have been valuable contributors to our engagement level.

Video 06 - Employee Retention

- **Perry Monaco, Strategic Product Consultant, LinkedIn**
- **Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto**
- **Kirk Merrett, Director, Human Resources and General Affairs, Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Canada (previous role)**
- **Val D'sa, Manager, Administration, Compensation and Benefits, York Region District School Board**
- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**

Perry Monaco

Branding your organization and being open and honest with potential hires

From my experience, retaining key employees is all about being as open and honest as you possibly can in that whole recruitment process. As an employee, when I have the ability to read and learn about the employment brand and truly experience what it's like to work at your organization based on what you're telling me as an employer, but also what your current employees are able to tell me, that's going to increase the chances that the decision that I make to join the organization is the correct one. One that will help me longer term in my career.

It's not only to the candidate's benefit, but to the employer's benefit, to get that branding out there, so that the right type of people that are going to fit that culture are going to be the ones that you're interacting with.

Lisa Kimmel

Employee satisfaction surveys

Every year we conduct a global Employee Satisfaction Survey, and consistently the Edelman Toronto office has the highest employee satisfaction rates of any of our 63 offices worldwide and that really can be attributed to the investment that we've made in our employee engagement efforts.

Shawn McIntyre

Employees' quality of work / life

We're really big on quality of life, so we have a great office; our facilities are very well stocked. We have food, drinks, lots of diversions. We work very hard but we also have a lot of fun. We have quiet spaces and a lot of activities after work and things that sort of bond us, and keep employees happy.

Kirk Merrett

Communicating company goals and aligning employee performance

Company goals are so important to communicate to staff; but tying the individual's goals to the company goals is vital as well. You also need to measure those goals. That measurement can be time, it can be deadline oriented; there can be a quality component. It can be a challenge to set up the objectives, but the payoff is down the line when it's really clear whether the person met that objective or not, and therefore, how they impacted the company's goals and performance.

Video 07 Recruitment Strategies

- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**
- **Perry Monaco, Strategic Product Consultant, LinkedIn**
- **Val D'sa, Manager, Administration, Compensation and Benefits, York Region District School Board**

Perry Monaco

Hiring the right people in the right place at the right time

Hiring and recruiting is absolutely the number one key factor when it comes to the growth of your business long-term. The right people in the right place, at the right time is a huge variable that companies have to invest a lot of time and effort into.

If you make an incorrect hiring decision, that can impact your business for months and years to come. So hiring the right person can be something that's a very difficult process and frankly, can be a frustrating process for a lot of organizations, especially if they're not tapping into a particular market that they have access to using the LinkedIn network.

Perry Monaco

Seeking out "passive candidates"

80% of our network is classified as what we would call "passive candidates", meaning people are not on LinkedIn to look for work, but would be interested in hearing about the next great step in their careers.

Tapping into that market of passive candidates (where they're not actively seeking a new employer at this particular time) can really put you into the next level of talent acquisition at your organization. It can get you the right people that you need to find, without only relying upon the individuals who are currently on the market right now.

Shawn McIntyre

Encouraging referrals

We hire very competitively, so we often use different tools and recruiters. We often reach out to people within our company to find some of the better candidates that they've either worked with or are friends with, or colleagues from previous jobs.

We do encourage referrals, so one of our best tools in finding talented people is to refer to our already talented people that we have on staff.

Val D'sa

Three effective methods of recruiting

These methods have been very successful, in my experience. The first is campus recruitment. This is a method that is widely used and is highly effective. The second method is using job boards of professional associations. The third method that I have extensively used is an employee referral program. This is popular and very effective. When the employee refers the prospective candidate, the employee is confident that it is a good candidate because the employee's reputation is at stake.

Shawn McIntyre

Helping employees feel part of the corporate culture

Depending on the position, there's likely some intensive training. There's usually a lot of immersion, some events to mingle and get to know each other. Different departments have different ways of "breaking in" their employees. They introduce them to the team at "all hands meetings" and we have events to introduce the new people to the current people and usually there is some background that is sent to everybody so we have insight not only into their professional career up to that point, but also their personality.

Perry Monaco

Building your employment brand

A lot of times organizations do a great job taking care of the corporate branding perspective. However, that's very different, potentially, from your actual employment brand. What is it about your organization that you want people to know to encourage them to join your organization as an employee? Letting people know why your organization is a destination, why your organization is a place that you want to invest in your career, and how it is that you can go about doing that.

Video 16 Advice for Small Business

- **Shane Creamer, AVP, Talent Acquisition TD Bank Group**
- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**
- **Perry Monaco, Strategic Product Consultant, LinkedIn**
- **Meghan Livingstone, HR Relationship Manager, TD Bank Group**
- **Dennis Tao, Interim Executive**

Shane Creamer

Transparency and communication

To me it all comes down to communication; people want to know where the company is going. Be open, be honest, be transparent; have difficult conversations with people if you need to. It's about living transparently, communicating openly and being honest. These are things, whether your company is large or small, that we all appreciate. They're really characteristics or traits that we think all organizations can live by.

Shawn McIntyre

Talent isn't always contained in a long resume

Personally I would say that talent isn't always a long resume. Talent comes in many different shapes and forms and smaller companies shouldn't worry about competing with larger companies when it comes to talent and acquiring the best people. They can find the best people through creative methods.

On the retention side, it's very important that you engage with your employees, that you make sure that everyone is part of the process; is happy with the work they're doing. If they're not, then communication needs to then take place to figure out how they can feel engaged and happy with their current employment.

Perry Monaco

Have honest conversations with candidates

One of the tips you can take advantage of when you're trying to find your next great hire is to make sure you have those honest conversations with candidates about what it is that they are really looking for. It's not always about talking to an individual about what they're looking for today, but it could be just as important to find out where they want to go in their career, especially if it's a junior or intermediate position. While that might satisfy them today, really dig in and find out where they want to be tomorrow and see if there's a potential career path that you can start to outline right from the very beginning. That is something which will help retain that individual; give them something to work towards.

Meghan Livingstone

Know who your employee is - being interactive, engaged

I think the things we do here at TD as a large organization, do help to make us successful, but I don't think they're applicable because we're a large organization. Here at TD, we're about how we do things, and not just simply about getting them done. That means being very committed to the employee experience.

My recommendation to any business is: don't make your employee relationship transactional. Make it interactive, be engaged; know who your employee is. Know what motivates them and what they aspire to do. And then find synergies between that employee and what you're looking to do in your business.

Dennis Tao

Encouraging responsibility, diversity in job functions, and initiative

Give people as much responsibility as you can and as much diversity in their jobs as you can, and allow them to take initiative.

There is not a single industry that somebody could point to that hasn't undergone change. If you have somebody that's really stuck in the mud that will say, "this is how things have always been done that this is how we do things and why should we change?", then those are not the types of people that you probably want in your organization.

Video 13 – Employee Engagement

- **Lisa Kimmel, General Manager, Public Relations Consultant, Edelman Toronto**
- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**
- **Rob Chaggares, Partner, Chaggares and Bonhomme, Chartered Accountants**
- **Perry Monaco, Strategic Product Consultant, LinkedIn**
- **John Cardella, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Ceridian Canada**

Lisa Kimmel

Being employee-centric

Our model is an employee centric model – we believe that if all employees are motivated and engaged to come to work every day, they’re going to then be motivated to do great work on behalf of our clients, which will ultimately help us to grow our business. We have applied that model for the last several years and we have seen that it has paid off for us.

Shawn McIntyre

Involving employees in decision making and having “fun time”

Engagement for us means that when we do have events and things going on, all of the people are involved. We make a point of involving everybody, not only in decision making but also in our fun time so that nobody feels excluded. Anyone from our developers to our customer service people are all included in our events, just to make sure that everybody feels they’re part of a team.

Even though we have been growing significantly, we want to make sure that our personal relationships with everyone are the same across the company and everybody feels like they’re part of this group.

Rob Chaggares

Work / life balance and showing appreciation

It’s important to understand who it is that you’re working with and what their goals are, and then being open with them. For me, it’s all about communication with our employees; making sure that they understand where they are.

You never want to surprise an employee with either being let go or not getting the pay or bonus that they thought they should get, for example. It is important to have a good level of communication between employer and the employee so that they understand where they fit into the picture. Everybody just wants to be appreciated and wanted.

Shawn McIntyre

Introducing and integrating new employees

We take our whole team off-site; we go somewhere fun, we lock down a venue and normally all of the new people are made to introduce themselves in person even though we send out emails to introduce everybody who’s new, and we give everyone their backgrounds.

We make those people stand in front of the group and tell us a little about themselves; it gives us a great opportunity to get to know those people, because getting an email about someone being hired isn’t necessarily the same thing as actually seeing that person and hearing them speak. After the “all hands” meetings, we’ll often get together and stay together and have a meal or take in some kind of event. Our meetings are usually very fun; they’re very driven for an hour or two and then we get to have some fun.

Perry Monaco

Walking the floor and using discernment

I'm not sure if there is a scientific formula to determine whether employees are engaged, but there certainly are a lot of anecdotal things that you're able to discern about the health of your employees and the culture at your organization. You can certainly get that from walking the floor.

It's really important to make sure that all aspects of your employment brand online are consistent and positive. If they're not, utilize that as a measurement to figure out how it is that you can get to a point where they are deemed to be positive.

John Cardella

For small business – have meetings and get feedback

We talk to people and we do a lot of surveys, but we encourage small business owners and employees to continually have meetings with their staff; have crew meetings. Understand how things are going. What do we need to improve? Are employees happy? We want employees to be thinking about the job, and not distracted because they're not happy about some things that are going on at work.

A small business owner is in a great position. It doesn't take a long time to have a half an hour chat with their crew once a week or once a month, to understand how things are going. In a large organization we do surveys that basically give us a pulse of how our people are feeling and what they're looking for. It's listening that allows us to make the changes that keep our employees engaged.

Video 14 Workplace Culture

- **Shawn McIntyre, Community Relations Manager, Kijiji, an eBay Company**
- **Jennifer Hobbs, Human Resources Manager, Strategic Information Technology**
- **Rob Catalano, Vice President, Marketing, Achievers Corporation**
- **John Cardella, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer, Ceridian Canada**

Shawn McIntyre

Building passion and engagement in the workplace

In our industry, culture is a big thing and a lot of people don't necessarily know that in the dot.com business we are locked away at our computers all day!

For us, culture is important. We have a lot of fun with each other. We plan a lot of events to build teamwork and friendships, and that helps our work environment. In that way we also want to make sure that our office is conducive to having fun, and having the chance to get away from work occasionally.

Jennifer Hobbs

Helping employees feel they're more than just a job

Because we're a family-owned company we focus a lot on family and teamwork and we work very closely together. We do a lot for employees such as Christmas parties for the kids and grandchildren at SIT, where Santa comes and hands out gifts. We feel very connected to being part of a whole family. We also support local charities and charitable events in town such as Dragon Boat races.

Perhaps employees have family members that are going through something. Everybody supports and helps raise money for various causes.

Val D'sa

Being a welcoming and respectful organization

Hiring is the first part, and retention is the next important part in the cycle of human resources management. If you hire good people and they don't stick to an organization, it is like a bottomless bucket; you pour water and the water doesn't sit there.

Employees don't stick to an organization unless they find that the organization is a welcoming and respectful workplace and they feel that their contribution is recognized and rewarded.

John Cardella

Satisfied employees and satisfied customers

You have satisfied employees; you have satisfied customers, because they're happy dealing with your people. When you have satisfied customers, whether they're walk-ins, or whether they're through the telephone – they stay with the organization; they're loyal to you. That means that business goes up.

I would encourage small business owners to think about how you can engage your workforce. Think about such things as maybe putting aside a little bit of a bonus plan. Enough so that your employee feels really connected with the business; and they'll push to do the right things for the business.

Rob Catalano

Fit, patterns of success, skills and results

The recruitment process and interview process at Achievers is relatively long. We think it's important to spend a lot of time up-front finding out exactly who someone is.

Usually the first interview is what we call the meet and greet. It's an opportunity to meet the leader of the department to really understand what the role looks and feels like; what the company culture is.

It's really as much of an opportunity for that candidate to interview us as it is for them. Then second practice is to learn more about their skills and results. What have they done in their career? How does it match with what the role looks and feels like today?

Full length videos

Laura Williams

Principal and Lawyer, Williams HR Law



Our firm is a labour and employment law firm. We provide full service labour relations and employment advice for employers. Really key to our practice is in terms of servicing employment needs, is, a lot of the employment law disputes or issues that our lawyers face comes from lack of engagement in the workplace.

In launching our firm, the one thing that's been the key focus and part of our vision, is making sure that we hire individuals that fit the model and understand the culture and vision in terms of where we're going.

In terms of strategies, one thing that's been in sharp focus is making sure we hire the right people, and that we're not hiring out of desperation. Ensuring that they understand the firm, they understand our philosophy; they understand the key and important aspects of our service proposition. And we make sure we get that right.

Getting the right hire

A lot of times employers fail in terms of engaging their workforce, because they have not been strategic in identifying specifically what they're hiring for. Often, they just need a body and they don't think about the role; they don't think about making sure they have the individual that has the right competencies.

We really focus on making sure that the individuals that we hire on understand the roles that they have to fulfill. They understand the culture. Also, employees are looking for certain things out of an employment experience and often employers are so focused on what they need, as opposed to what the employees need to get out of the experience.

By virtue of not making sure that these two things line up, you can have a mismatch. It's focusing on all of the aspects of ensuring that the employment relationship is fulfilling, because by doing that, you end up with a productive and engaged environment.

Creating a culture of growth and potential

I think it's important to create a culture and environment where people feel that they can grow to their fullest potential. That starts with making sure you hire the right people. As we're a smaller firm, in terms of my leadership style, I don't have any interest in micro managing individuals. I want employees to understand what the end product needs to be in terms of our client service, and allow them to go about it within their own styles.

When you allow people to work within their own styles and competencies, and they are given an opportunity to show you what they know and to do their best and be their best; that goes a long way to achieving engagement in the workplace.

Hiring for competencies

The advice I would give a smaller company? First of all, you don't want to hire out of desperation. Really do a lot of front-end thinking in terms of what you need. Look at the role; make sure the role is well defined. Often what you find is employees are not passing muster. They're not fulfilling the employer's needs because the needs aren't well defined.

Before you get to the people, you have to think about the role, and what's required. Once that's in place, the employer should make sure that the candidate has the key competencies before an employment offer is extended.

Getting the right managers in place

Another issue that a lot of employers face is hiring an individual to manage who doesn't have the people management skills or acumen. That's a huge problem. As the saying goes, employees leave managers; they often don't leave companies.

Make sure that you have the right managers in place and that those managers are trained with respect to how to manage people; how to employ engagement strategies to ensure that employees are fulfilled in their work, and productive.

Have clear expectations

Many employers, when they hire, don't make expectations clear. Making expectations clear can be as simple as an employment agreement that sets out mutual entitlements, obligations, rules and general expectations in the workplace.

A lot of employers miss that opportunity because they think agreements sound too legal, too formal, and the offer may not be as attractive. Actually, you're doing the employee a favour, because you're giving them a set of expectations, so they know whether or not they're making the mark or missing it.

Create good policies

Again, many times employers don't want to implement policies because they don't want to be "too formal"; they don't want to be too regimented. You are doing the employees a great service when you have those systems in place, because the expectations are set and it gives the employer an opportunity to benchmark.

Added to that is a job description. There is some caution; you want to make sure that the job description isn't an exhaustive list because (particularly smaller) employers need flexibility. It sets out the guideposts to ensure that individuals are operating within those guidelines and that they are meeting expectations.

Conduct solution-focused performance appraisals

Another important practice that many employers are not consistent with is conducting performance appraisals. In my view, that is a lost opportunity because performance appraisals, and more importantly, informal feedback, should be given very frequently.

With respect to the official formal appraisal, it's important; but the ongoing feedback, and the good feedback, is really important to incent people. Most of us are wired so that we like to hear that we've doing a job well. One of the worst strategies that actually thwarts engagement and causes disengagement and disgruntled employees, is when you're only focusing on what's going

wrong. Be solution focused, not problem focused when dealing with staff, because that really does bring the best out in people.

Perform due diligence at the “front end”

Some of the key challenges that a lot of small organizations have around employee engagement is not feeling that they have a fair opportunity to actually strategize hiring and recruitment. That translates in a failure to pay proper attention to who they need.

A lot of smaller organizations, particularly organizations that may be entrepreneurial, and experiencing quick growth, end up hiring from desperation and there are a lot of poor hires. What happens when you bring on individuals that are ill suited to the role is that sometimes they may actually have a negative impact on morale (even not intentionally, because they are underperforming).

Again, one thing that a lot of small organizations do is that they don't pay adequate attention to recruiting and making sure that they're hiring the right people. As well, a lot of growing organizations hire or promote managers that are ill-suited to managerial decisions that involve managing people. If managers with the front line responsibility of dealing with people don't do it right, they can cause significant disengagement that ruptures workplace morale.

It's the due diligence at the front end, it's really making sure that the right hire is in place and that it's the right hire in terms of level of management. A lot of smaller organizations do need individuals that can work fairly autonomously; not everyone can do that. It's not that they're not capable, but some individuals like to get consistent feedback and you may not have the bandwidth in a smaller organization to do that.

You've got to be able to have the employees with the right skills and capabilities to operate within the mandate you need them to. Even on an ongoing basis, it's making sure that you set up in writing, as well as you reinforce verbally, the expectations in the workplace. That's another thing that is often missed by employers.

Smaller employers don't necessarily (maybe by virtue of time) often have the resources. They often don't make the investment at the front end to make sure that those employment systems (as I call them): a written employment agreement, policies, job descriptions – they just don't put the time in, because they feel they don't have it, and don't appreciate the aggravation and cost that they're going to avoid by doing so at the front end.

It's a key piece of the front end investment, that anything that you're doing related to the workplace be intentional. I use that word a lot because many workplaces, large and small, are very reactive rather than proactive.

It's a matter of taking the time to think about what the needs really are. Then thinking about the types of individuals required for those needs, and finding out from those people whether their needs are aligned. Finding out what they get from the experience, and also what the employer needs in terms of fulfilling their objectives.

Often, employers think from purely a business standpoint. They're so focused on profit, revenue, profitability; they don't realize that people are their engine. There may not have adequate focus on people. They may not have employees that are taken care of and are well selected. Employees may not be given adequate and proper and consistent feedback to make sure that those revenue and bottom line objectives are met.

Job Seekers – communicate what you want to get out of the experience

The advice I'd give for someone seeking to get a job with our company is to really communicate to us what they're looking to get out of the experience.

The way that we conduct our interviews here is we spend a fair amount of time talking about the firm's vision. We're a growing organization, so it's really important for candidates to understand where we're going; not only where we are.

It's very important for candidates to decide whether or not they see that as something that will engage them in the short or long term because I'm doing as much of an assessment of them as they should be doing of our firm.

We also make sure that everybody in our firm at this point gets a chance to have some interaction with the candidate, because it's really important for our engaged team to feel that they've got some buy in, or at least a voice in, who's going to be joining the team. It goes back to the point that it is a team.

That doesn't mean that all of the staff have the ultimate decision, but I do want to hear from them with respect to how they feel this individual will fit, because it's been critical to our success in having an engaged team.

Rob Catalano

Vice President, Marketing, Achievers Corporation



Driving performance

Achievers helps companies retain and inspire their employees and drive performance in organizations. What we do is we build great software to allow companies to do that. So when we think of the behaviours and the things that you want employees doing to drive performance on a day to day basis, we create a tool to help companies to do that. Whether it is through recognition or performance-type programs, we really want to see employees be successful. Because we know that when business is successful employees are successful.

Recruiting, retaining and inspiring great people

On the front door of our office, we have a saying from our founder that says, our top priorities are to recruit, retain and inspire great people. And we think about that on a daily basis not only for our own employees but for our software. What we do helps other companies do that as well.

Find people who will live, believe and drive towards your organization's values

One of the first things from a recruitment standpoint is, you need to find people that are going to live, believe and drive towards your organization's values. Here at Achievers, is, we find people who are passionate about the things we're passionate about and live our values every day. Having those things aligned early on, really helps people to be successful. Not just the individuals themselves but the company as well.

Recognize your employees - what gets recognized gets repeated

From an inspiring and engaging standpoint, we come from a very high recognition-rich culture and we believe recognition's important, getting people to that peak performance. People shouldn't be at a job just for salary or just for something to do on a daily basis; it's something where they should feel really engaged in how they contribute to the bigger picture of the organization. Recognition is a really good way to do that, because what's recognized gets repeated.

When you recognize people it's an intrinsic motivation that they have to continue those behaviours moving forward. When you make it public, the whole organization gets on board and sees why this is important. There are so many other elements that go into an engaged employee as well. It has to do with good communication in the organization; it has to do with great leadership. There's really no one silver bullet to having engagement, but there are certain elements you need to look at in your organization and find out how you are going to drive those things forward.

If you really define what your company wants to look and feel like, what those key behaviours are, what your core values are, and you start there - then you can start implementing programs and practices and put expectations in place for the rest of the company in order to drive those behaviours and build that culture or build that engagement.

Achievers' TTP Meetings – Alignment, Communication, Wins, Transparency, Accountability

One of the things we do to help communication and engagement at Achievers is a daily meeting that the whole organization participates in. We've been doing it for over 6 years now and we started when there were 15 of us at a meeting. Today there are over 150 people that come to that meeting every day.

At 11:51 the company participates in what we call at TTP, which stands for "to the point", and it is just that; a nine minute meeting to get alignment and communication for the whole organization. If you're ever in Toronto at 11:51 and you want to swing by and see that, we always have guests and a lot of great people come and visit us, as well as write about that activity.

That's the focus. We talk about some of the wins within the organization. We talk about some of the activities that are happening that everyone should be aligned with. Departments come in and have accountability for what their goals are during that quarter and share those with the rest of the company as well. We also have an opportunity to recognize each other or to raise any red flags that we need to address. It is also a good communication method about how the company is doing. We're also very transparent about how the organization is doing from a performance standpoint and we want everyone in the company to know that because everyone contributes.

I think that's a major component of engagement as well. People understanding what their role is within the bigger picture; in the success of the organization. We've been doing it for 6 years and will continue to do it, even when we get to 400 plus employees!

Hiring - look to your employees to refer great talent

Achievers has been hiring at a rapid rate over the last 4 years. And the first place we look for great talent is our own employees. We are true believers that A players know other A players. So we spend a lot of effort on recruiting programs we call "Rock star Referrals". We have our internal A players look for "Rock star Referrals" in their networks.

In 2012, 45% of the hires we made at Achievers came from referrals. That comes with a lot of benefits. First, you know that people are referring people that match your culture; they know what's important. They know they're going to be engaged here, and they know that this is an environment they're going to succeed in.

The second thing is that referrals traditionally cost about a quarter of what normal recruiting practices are. For us, being able to find people at less recruiting cost is a great thing. We see a lot of people actually doing that from a customer standpoint within our platform to drive that success as well. We look for people that are connected with people internally here. And also try to find people that live and breathe the culture as well.

Interview for synergy and fit

The interview process at Achievers is fairly long. We like to say we like to hire slow and fire fast. And the fire fast part isn't meant to scare anyone, but we want to find people that live and breathe the culture and we make that assessment really early on. Therefore the recruitment process and interview process at Achievers is relatively long. We think it's important to spend a lot of time up front finding out exactly who someone is. We talk a lot about culture and fit here and the first interview is really a meet and greet. It's an opportunity to meet the leader of the department - not HR, but the leader; to really understand what the role looks and feels like and what the company culture is. We get them in the office but it's as much of an opportunity for that individual to interview us as it is for us to interview them.

Focus on patterns of success

The second practice is usually more about the skills and results – what have they done in their career. How does it match what the role looks and feels like today? So it goes from fit, number one, to the second which is more skills-based. The third thing we do, and a lot of people are not familiar with this methodology of interviewing, is called Top Grading. It focuses on people's patterns of success, from all the way in high school to their last job. Literally it's a series of questions that goes from high school, university, college, to every single job they've ever had, to look for patterns of success. I've seen these interviews go one hour – I've seen them go 6 and a half hours!

It's an in-depth look at "what did you do in this organization?" How did you drive results? How did you impact or manage teams? So through that 3 step process, I'd say we're 95% of the time ready to find out if we can make an offer to the individual,

Wavering on a hire

One of the rules we have around here is, if you think that you're wavering on a hire, don't make that hire. We don't want to waver; we want to find great people. That's maintained a great culture and a great pattern of success, not only for employee growth but for company growth at Achievers as well.

Set up your recognition program to involve the entire organization

There are a lot of strategies to keep all-star employees and our A players at Achievers, and one of them we do use is from a recognition standpoint. As we provide this similar engagement and performance software and platforms to other companies, we like to say that we drink our own champagne.

We spend a lot of time using our software, being guinea pigs for our own software and using the right tools in order to do that. One of the strategies I mentioned is from a recognition standpoint. We believe that there is an opportunity to not have recognition be a top down activity, which it is in most organizations unfortunately, but we open up recognition to the whole company. So every single employee at Achievers (and we're seeing a lot of our customers do this as well) has an opportunity to recognize other employees for the right key behaviours and values we have identified as an organization. Everyone has a budget to do that. A lot of companies look at that and say, wow, that's a big thing to allow all of our employees to contribute and even spend budget on those type of things, but we think it's important.

If it's leadership down, it's kind of forced. You only have a certain amount of people in the organization that are seeing the behaviours on a daily basis. When you open it up to the rest of your employees, it amplifies it. Everyone sees the activities. The world and the market are getting a little more social; a little more mobile. You may not see these activities every day, so we really leverage our whole team in order to contribute in recognizing what behaviours and values are important. It resonates with the rest of the company.

Cross-functional communication

Another thing we do is focus on communication. We have a lot of cross functional discussions on identifying what's important; how do we drive things forward. We spend a lot of time with our managers and our leaders to find out what are the right practices that are working, because we know, many times people leave managers, they don't leave jobs. A lot of folks from a management training standpoint are understanding how to get those employees engaged.

Communication also goes two ways. We spend a lot of time; whether it's with focus groups, or meetings, or lunch and learns, to find out from employees, what we can do to get them further engaged. We do engagement scores for our leaders within the organization every quarter. We find out that information and we start distilling what we can do to move things forward.

Help employees be successful on a day-to-day basis

In fact, we don't have an HR department. We actually had a little funeral for HR, we said HR is dead, and we call our department Employee Success. Really, that's what the focus of the organization should be. How do we make employees successful on a day to day basis? There's a lot of two-way communication to identify those things and put up best practices on how we can drive better engagement in the company.

Maintain accountability aligned with organizational and individual goals

The next part is performance. We are very clear in terms of what the organization's top goals are, what the department goals are, what the individual goals are; making sure they all contribute up to the bigger picture. We're very transparent; everyone has their top goal, professionally and personally and we make sure that we look at those things and maintain accountability for what people should be doing, aligned with their top goals.

There are a lot of things we do in order to drive engagement and performance within the company from a leadership and individual level as well.

The correlation between personal and professional success

One thing I've found in terms of doing a lot of recruiting, at Achievers and in my career; people who are successful personally are also successful professionally. We talk of achievements from high school and university. You just see a good synergy between success at work and success outside of work.

Support employees in their personal goals

What we do at Achievers, we want to highlight and understand that people have other lives outside of the workplace. We do something called Personal Top Ones. We ask every individual at the beginning of our fiscal year, what is one goal that you want to accomplish? It has to be a personal, not a professional, goal. It might be a self goal, a wealth goal, a health goal; but what is something you want to do?

We write them all down, we post them up in the office and we try to find synergies, or commitments that people have that are very similar, and try to partner those people together so that they can achieve those goals. We want people to be successful outside of the office too, and anything we can do to help them, we definitely want to make that happen. We not only help make that happen, we do contribute a monetary amount if they contribute to that goal.

We also recognize these goals at the very highest level of the company. We want people to feel like rock stars and achievers when they do hit their goals and we want to make sure that we help them, but also identify that they've done it, and be a big part of the celebration as well.

Create an environment that helps employees communicate and collaborate

At Achievers we believe that a positive work environment is important. Just to maintain the communication and the levels of culture that you want to build in your company. At Achievers we are very open and collaborative, very transparent with how the organization is doing.

There are really no offices here; everyone is in the open, and we want to make sure that that resonates with what's important to the organization. For us, it's important to us to have our customers be successful, so we built that type of environment.

Allow employees to personalize their environment

We also give people a lot of autonomy to employees to create their own environments, whether it's departmentally or individually at their desks. If you walk around the Achievers office you're going to see a lot of things like large stuffed animals and things hanging from the beams. That's our culture. We help a lot of other organizations create a great culture as well, but it's theirs. That's one thing we really can't duplicate; culture when it comes to recruiting, retaining and inspiring great people.

Achievers' Employee Success Software – driving engagement and performance

What we like to say at Achievers is, we create employee success software. Really what employee success is, it's an intersection between engagement and performance. When you have employee engagement and employee performance, you are going to see employee success. What a lot of companies are starting to see right now, and in HR we've been talking about this for many years, is that when you achieve that employee success, you're going to get customer loyalty and you're going to get shareholder value and business success.

It's the shareholder profit chain – successful employees will have customers that will be loyal and they will return, and you're going to have great business results. At Achievers, that's what we do. We create software to help businesses with the employee success part of it. We create software to help companies engage their employees, whether it's through recognition and rewards, driving communication, or whether it's through some of the other components to help managers have the tools to engage their employees. We also are on the performance end, giving managers tools to manage the performance of their employees. We identify key behaviours or key results that the company wants and manage those programs.

What we've done is we've taken our software and the ability to consolidate all the programs that happen in an ad-hoc way in an organization in different departments and different locations, and have it all in one platform. We can then communicate to employees the behaviours we want to see, the values that we live by and the results and performance that we need, and allow the rest of the organization to drive that in the software that's easy to track and manage.

We work with a lot of top employers in North America and the world, to drive those engagement and performance factors, and a lot of those top performers continue to utilize the software to do that because as you know the world is changing the workforce is changing, not just geographically but even the type of generation that we have in our workforce today.

And that's in a nutshell what we do. Help companies drive engagement and performance and employee success!

Marie-Hélène Budworth

Associate Professor of Human Resource Management, York University



My job is that of a typical professor; we have responsibilities to research, to teaching, and to the university. About a third of my work is service to the university, helping with running of programs, sitting on committees that make decisions around the university's policies and procedures, and then a third of the time I teach courses. The types of courses I teach are subjects like Negotiation, Introduction to Human Resource Management, Leading Teams, and then my research. I have a full research program that I think would be defined as falling within Learning and Development.

Company reputation as key to recruitment

Companies that have the easiest time with recruitment? Companies that already have an external reputation. Companies that do a lot of work not only with branding themselves for the consumer but who take care about developing their reputation as an employer. Not only letting their employees know, but letting the public know, that "this is the type of employer we are, this is what we stand for", and then having policies that are consistent with this overall vision of who they want to be as an employer.

When that's the case, often there is a little more ease communicating with the public when it comes time to fill positions and recruit, but also there's a bit of filtering, so people are able to self-select before submitting applications: What it is that this company stands for? Is this a company that I might enjoy working for or not working for? That type of work that's done even when a job is not available can be really valuable in filling jobs quickly.

Some turnover - desirable and acceptable

There are a number of reasons why it's really important for companies to retain their employees. I don't want to give the impression though, that it's important for companies to retain all of their employees. It's not. A certain level of turnover is important for the organization in order to ensure that you're getting new ideas; you're getting awareness of what's happening more broadly in the market. You're getting a bit of freshness in the organization; people actually questioning the way you do things. So you don't end up in this place where "this is the way we do things just because it's the way we do things here".

There is an acceptable level of turnover that should be encouraged. Beyond that, there is a need to have a core workforce that is engaged and committed and happy to be there. And that's important for organizational knowledge.

The Importance of knowledge holders

There's actually a lot of research on the power of knowledge holders within the organization; knowledge brokers, people within the organization that hold the keys to what makes this organization work. Things that aren't necessarily explicit; things that I can't write down in a

manual and hand to the new employee, but things we know because we've been in this place for a while and we know that this is the way things work here.

Holding onto that knowledge is something that can be done by holding onto those key people within the organization. It's also important to hold onto employees, simply because it makes the functioning of business easier, from a logistical standpoint, to have continuity. To not be in this constant recruitment/hiring cycle which is a really expensive process because of the time it takes within HR. Also be able to build effective workgroups; teams that understand each other, that know each other, that have some experience together.

Group continuity and productivity

We know from research that groups actually have a lifecycle of productivity. At the beginning of their lifecycle they are not terribly productive. They could be cohesive and happy, but this is the time of their lifecycle when they are developing, getting to know each other, getting to understand where the strengths lie within the group, what people know.

Then they have a period of time where they're incredibly productive as group. And at the end of it, there's a finite time when they are productive, and after that the group becomes stale and could become overconfident and all kinds of things can happen that decrease productivity.

Continuity is important to make sure that you can have groups, or a workplace that is actually functioning in this optimal space, where people know each other, where they've had a chance to understand each other, and now they are getting down to business.

Putting meaning into work

Retaining good and strong employees is always a challenge. Some of the things that people are researching now (and I'll speak to the research of it, because that's where I have the most to offer in terms of my knowledge), are the ways that you can inject meaning into work.

Things like, how can we structure work, how can we organize people's work so that the work itself is valuable to them? So that people do the work because it's meaningful?

There's a lot of work on something called prosocial motivation. It's a type of motivation where, if the person who is doing the work understands what the benefit of that work is to another employee or to the end user, it will increase the likelihood that they will be engaged and motivated and committed to the task, which will lead to higher performance.

It's not necessarily connecting them to a reward, or telling them, "If you do this, we'll give you this", it's telling them, "If you do this, look at all of the things, all of the benefits that will come to others because of it". This doesn't have to be in an industry where you're fundraising; where there's some sort of altruistic outcome; it can be in any industry because all of our work impacts other people.

Helping employees make progress in their work

Just helping people identify in which ways it does impact; that's something we're seeing a lot of in the literature. Another thing that we're seeing a lot of, which is really interesting, is around making progress within your work. There's some work coming out of Harvard around the power of progress within work. If you can help people to make small steps towards an outcome that they're working towards, or to make progress, then that in itself is motivating.

Managers as facilitators of progress

Teaching managers in a lot of ways to be facilitators of progress, rather than managing the way work is done. What can I do to open doors, acquire resources or move obstacles? To feel at the end of the day, that employees have gotten closer to something that they're working towards? That can be something that can keep people motivated and engaged in their workplaces.

Communicating the "why"

Connected back to the points that were just made, I think that in small business there's an advantage. They're often dealing with employees who are closely connected to the outcomes that they're working towards as an organization. Employees who are doing a large range of activities because of the nature of small business - everybody has to put their hands in where the help is needed.

So to the extent that the leadership within the organization is able to communicate effectively, "this is why we're doing all of this, this is what's important, this is what I'm aiming for" - "in the long run I'm hoping for this outcome" - to the extent that I, as an employee, can see how the work I'm doing is feeding into that long term view of the world, it can be really helpful in keeping me engaged. I'm working towards something meaningful. I know where this company is going and I know what my role is in getting us there. That can be a useful way of keeping people connected.

Sometimes we make the mistake of just telling employees what to do without ever telling them why or what it's connected to. It becomes a fairly rote task for them. The minute we start to tell them, "This is what we're working on" and "Isn't this interesting?", and "Do you see how this connects to that?", then they leave the room with the task with an entirely different view on how it should be done. It's just a simple way of motivating that can help keep people connected to why their work is important.

Be a facilitator, a leader, within your small business

The second piece would be around the progress idea; you can be a facilitator as a leader within a small business. Often we have managers that come down and say, "well that's not exactly the way you should be doing it". Sometimes we fall into these correction types of modes. If we can hire well, hire the right people for the job, trust that they can do that job, then just get out of the way and do things that help your employees on the course that they've been set on.

Exit interviews – when and why?

That's a really important idea; the idea of making sure that as somebody is on their way out of the organization, that you're capturing some of their knowledge and some of their experiences in understanding why it did or did not work.

The exit interview is kind of a classic way of trying to do that; sometimes they're quite successful and sometimes they're absolutely not. Depends on the terms with which somebody's leaving the organization. If they're leaving on fairly good terms, you can probably get a fair amount of information from them. The problem comes when somebody's leaving and they're not happy they're leaving. Then it can be quite difficult to get the information you require, but an attempt should always be made. An exit interview is a great way to do that.

Even following up with the employee, with their permission, sometime down the road can be beneficial. That allows the nostalgia, the positive feelings, or the difficult feelings of a negative exit, to kind of dissipate a little bit. Then you can get some more considered thoughts later on and if you get something meaningful, checking it out with your current employees. If there are some themes that come up, from maybe 1 or 2 exits that happen, and now you're concerned that there may be other themes, checking it out with the people that are remaining within the organization to see whether or not this is something that we need to be concerned about – and what are the types of things we can do to correct these issues that we're observing.

Current Research

Retaining good and strong employees is always a challenge. Some of the things that people are researching now are the ways that you can inject meaning into work. Things like, how can we structure work? How can we organize people's work so that the work itself is valuable to them so that people do the work because it's meaningful?

There's a lot of work on something called pro-social motivation. It's a type of motivation where, if the person who is doing the work understands what the benefit of that work is to another employee or to the end user, it will increase the likelihood that they will be engaged and motivated and committed to the task, which will lead to higher performance.

It's not necessarily connecting them to a reward, or telling them, "if you do this, we'll give you this", it's telling them, "If you do this, look at all of the benefits that will come to others because of it". This doesn't have to be in an industry where there's some sort of altruistic outcome. It can be in any industry because all of our work impacts other people. Just helping people identify in which ways it does impact; that's something we're seeing a lot of in the literature.

Another thing that we're seeing a lot of, which is really interesting, is around making progress within your work. There's some work coming out of Harvard around the power of progress within work. If you can help people to make small steps towards an outcome that they're working towards, or to make progress, then that in itself is motivating.

Shane Creamer

AVP, Talent Acquisition TD Bank Group

Employee referrals and other recruiting methods

We have great employees here and they happen to know other great people that work in our different communities and that are in their networks, so we ask them to refer that talent to us.

We also use a number of different electronic methods. We have a fantastic TD.Com career site, which receives many applications in a day. We also use some cutting edge and innovative tools such as some of our great platforms out there, like the LinkedIn network, as well as job boards. So we have lots of different ways where people can get on the map with us and apply for potential opportunities.



Organizational fit when recruiting

When selecting people we really look at a lot of different things. We look for specific skills, role specific skills, competencies and experiences. Beyond that, we like to look at culture fit.

One of the things that we're very protective of at TD, is we do have such a phenomenal culture. We employ great people; we want to continue to employ great people, so we really look for people who fit our fabric in terms of our culture.

We also look for people who fit what we call our leadership profile here. So we've identified some very specific traits that we look for in our leaders, and when we bring employees in at different levels, we want to make sure that they also resemble these traits that fit our fabric internally.

One of the other overarching philosophies here at TD is we look to promote from within as well as hire externally, so any time we're hiring, even as a front-line entry level role, we're thinking of the future. One of our leadership principles is to build for the future, so we do have a line of sight to longer term career opportunities for these individuals if they join our company.

Encouraging a happy workplace by giving employees a voice

I think happy employees have a voice. I think a big part of being happy at work is knowing that your opinions are taken into account to some degree; what you say and how you feel is a part of who you are, not just in your personal life, but as well as in your work life.

We like to give our employees opportunity to do different things in our company; play different roles, have a voice, provide impact and influence to our business direction, as well give them an opportunity to give back to the communities that we serve. They have lots of opportunity to either volunteer, or participate in clubs, committees, etc, and really get actively involved in the communities that they come from. Ultimately these are the same communities that TD's customers come from.

Enabling employees with tools and support

We have a very simple formula that I've heard a number of people articulate to me since I've joined the company "happy employees equals happy customers, which equals better business". By making our employees happy and providing them with enabling tools and support, we think that they make our customers happier, which is obviously better for our business.

It's the small things that make us happy. TD announced last year that we gave all of our employees at all levels an extra day off, which was obviously well received news during the holiday season.

It's things like that, it's the extra days off here and there, the access to learning and development opportunities, the ability to promote from within, to have new careers within the organization; it's the small things we think make people happy here.

Transparency about the business; having difficult conversations

To me it all comes down to communication, people want to know where the company's going, what the direction is. Be open, be honest, be transparent; have difficult conversations with these people if you need to. It's about living transparently, communicating openly and being honest. These are things, that, whether your company's large or small, we all appreciate. They're really characteristics or traits that we think all organizations can live by.

Job Seekers – make the effort to stand out

Don't be a spectator. We're a phenomenal brand in a large company; we get a lot of people who express active interest in working for us. Take the time and put in the effort to stand out.

Use your electronic media but go to branches, network with folks who work here, get to know us; we'll in turn get to know you. That little bit of extra effort goes a long way in terms of us potentially recognizing talent or future potential in you, so. It's hard work, getting recognized and standing out from the pack, but a little bit of that extra effort we certainly think is to your advantage. Put that effort in and help to get to know us, so that we can get to know you.

Meghan Livingstone

HR Relationship Manager, TD Bank Group



Actively sourcing the broadest talent pool

At TD we really focus on getting the broadest talent pool available in the market. We leverage several techniques to do so. One of the most important things to touch on is that we leverage our brand and our reputation pretty seriously. That allows us to connect in a lot of different ways.

We can connect with not for profit organizations such as Career Edge, and we can add to our diversity and inclusivity through internship and co-op programs. We can then go ahead and leverage our TD.com site where we have applicants come to us because they know and agree that TD is a great place to work. They know that we are an employer of choice; that we are diverse and inclusive and they want to come to us and want to come into the organization.

I think more importantly, we know what we are looking for in our culture and we go out and we actively look for individuals who meet our needs. That means turning to tools such as LinkedIn, and making connections with individuals who are not necessarily job searching right now, but when you pick up the phone and say “My name’s Meghan, I work for TD and I have an opportunity I’d like to talk to you about”, you have their attention and you can get them excited.

That allows us to find the people who really, truly, match the niche skills that we’re looking for.

Hiring individuals with passion for the company

At TD it’s very important to us that we have individuals who are truly as passionate about what we stand for and the culture that we’re working and striving every day to maintain, as we are. By leveraging our brand, and making sure that individuals who are applying to us, or going through a process down the road of potentially joining us, really know what we’re about. We have a very active development plan here at TD, and we’re most concerned about getting the right fit for our culture, so that’s why all of these methods are really, truly important.

Building sustainable relationships with prospective candidates

I think if we look back at the comments we talked about, about actively going out and sourcing talent, what’s really important about that method is, we don’t just look to make connections with individuals for the job we have open today. We look to make connections that will take us forward into long lasting relationships.

That means we can meet you today and maybe not have the right opportunity for you, but we will have an opportunity to know you and your potential fit. Don’t be surprised if you receive, 3, 4, 5 phone calls from us, to meet individuals in the organization, to get to know you as best we can. Don’t be surprised if we call on you again in the future for an opportunity that really is a match!

Building lasting relationships

It's important at any organization; but here at TD we really believe in having long lasting relationships with our employees. We believe in an employee experience that makes (employees) want to stay, and we work on a lot of initiatives that take us over multiple years.

Having talent that knows us, that knows where we've been, where we are today and where we want to go, helps us to move quickly and actively, and helps us be the better bank, which is what we're out there in the market striving to do. So retaining people is what we're about, in order to create that type of environment.

Making your employee relationships interactive and non-transactional

I think the things we do here at TD as a large organization do help to make us successful, but I don't they're applicable because we're a large organization. Here at TD we're about how we do things, and not just simply about getting them done. So that means being very committed to the employee experience.

My recommendation to any business is, don't make your employee relationship transactional. Make it interactive, be engaged; know who your employee is. Know what motivates them and what they aspire to do and then find synergies between that employee and what you're looking to do in your business.

For example, when you make an offer to someone, who maybe comes into your organization in a very junior level but has a lot of great potential, if you can see that they have perhaps, project management aspirations, the next time that your team goes to launch an initiative, you give them a hand in that process. You stretch them and develop them. Being committed to an individual's development is something that makes them really want to come to work and give you 100%. So whether you're a company of 5 people, 500 or 5000, that will always work for you.

Know you are and be passionate about your values that align with the company

Really know who you are. We have a very strong leadership profile here, and we're looking for characteristics in individuals that are as passionate about those values as we are. Aside from that, don't be afraid to open the door and ask to meet new people, don't be afraid to put your name in and apply for a role. You never know what it might hold.

I mentioned that we're not all about interviewing for one specific job; we're about interviewing for the fit going forward. So even if it's not a match today, you have formed a long-term relationship with us.

So reach out, we'd like to know you.

Val D'Sa

**Manager, Administration, Compensation and Benefits
York Region District School Board**

Recruiting methods that work well

In my career I have used a number of recruiting methods. I'll focus on a few of them which I have found to be successful. The first is campus recruitment. This method is widely used and is very effective, as in one location you get to meet and hire a large pool of qualified candidates and you can also do your hiring in a day or two. That way it is very cost effective, very efficient, and also you are able to cut down the recruitment cycle in some cases from months to a day or two.

The second method is to use the job boards of professional associations. For example, if you are looking for someone to fill a position within Human Resources, Accounting or Purchasing, look for these people on the websites of their professional associations. These are the sites where they may post their resumes and it is a way to hire people in a cost efficient and quick manner.

The third method I have extensively used is the employee referral program. This is also very popular and effective. An employee refers someone they know personally to the organization. The employee will want to make sure that it's a good candidate, as his or her reputation is at stake. There may be some type of bonus or compensation to the employee for referring the candidate. You can cut down your hiring cycle by about 90% in many cases, with this method.

Another method is using headhunters to hire people at a senior level. If a company is looking for a CEO or VP, this can be a very effective method as you would not normally recruit someone at this level from an online or print ad.

Retention practices

Hiring is the first part, and retention is second. If you hire good people and they don't stick to an organization, it is like a bottomless bucket; the water won't stay in. Employees don't stick to an organization unless they find that organization is welcoming, respectful, their contributions are recognized and they are rewarded, engaged and satisfied.

It is widely believed that compensation makes people stick to an organization. It is only one of the factors. The employer needs to provide opportunities for an employee to grow. For example, having employees work on different projects. That is one way to make employees feel that their services are wanted, their contributions are recognized, and they are engaged. This also expands their skill set and gives them a sense of achievement and motivation.

Another way is to let employees have some time off for professional development. For example, to take a workshop or short course. These are intangible benefits and those strategies will help employees contribute very effectively to that employer.

Create an environment where every employee is respected

Retention is very important for a small to medium sized organization because they cannot afford the luxury of hiring an employee, training an employee and making that employee productive, just to lose that employee. There is a lot of investment that is made in an employee for a small to medium sized organization.

Advice to job-seekers

My advice for anyone looking for a job within YRDSB? Do some research. Look on the website, look at the job postings. Look for the education and experience that the job requires. Look at the job description carefully; read the responsibilities and required skills to get an idea of what you would need to have in order to be successful in that job. Find out who is in the Board that may be a networking contact. Perhaps call that person, diplomatically approaching that person and asking what has made that employee successful in that job?

Maybe find a mentor, not necessarily in the Board but someone who can assist you with feedback on your job search and provide helpful ideas and information.

Newcomers –persevere, be determined. The job market in this country is totally different from your home country. The Canadian market is such that a candidate has to do a lot of homework and research even before getting an interview. There is help available through agencies like yorkworks; there is help available through professional associations, there is help available through networking, there is help available if you can find good mentors, there is help available to write a good resume and cover letter and even on how to prepare for an interview. Have determination, persevere and never lose hope. You will land your job!