

Satisfied Employees, Successful Enterprise

FLEXIBILITY, PRIDE AND A CONNECTION TO AN EMPLOYER MAKE LOYAL EMPLOYEES

By Heather Hudson

Are Canadian workers more content in the workplace than we give them credit for? According to a study commissioned by Capital One Canada, under the right circumstances, even the purportedly finicky millennial generation is happy to stay put. Capital One Canada chief people officer, Jenny Winter, isn't surprised.

"The survey confirmed my perceptions here at Capital One: generally, employees are very satisfied where they are and are not looking to make a move," she said. "They have very high levels of pride and really make a connection to their employers."

The survey polled 1,510 Canadians 18 and over across the country and found that 69 per cent said they were proud to work for their current employer. Sixty-five per cent indicated they like telling people where they work.

Capital One Canada commissioned the survey in the spring of 2014 to help inform their expanding recruitment strategy.

"With our growth trajectory, we wanted to see what matters to Canadians to ensure we're offering a value proposition for future employees," said Winter.



talent management

SURVEY FINDINGS

According to the survey results, work/life balance is more important to prospective employees than compensation, with over half of respondents supporting this idea. However, 27 per cent would leave their current job for another position that offers more money but fewer perks, and a small percentage of respondents expect to switch employers at least every five years.

There are a number of things an employer can do to increase job satisfaction among employees. Over three-quarters of respondents indicated that regular bonuses with annual pay increases would be an incentive for staying with a company. In addition, a competitive retirement package with related benefits is attractive to workers. Associated with desiring work/life balance, flexible working hours with the option to work remotely is something that 44 per cent of survey respondents consider desirable in their own job.

On the other hand, the survey shed light on some things that employers do that make their employees consider quitting. Maintaining or contributing to poor office morale would cause over half of survey respondents to consider leaving their companies, as well as constantly increasing workloads without increasing rewards or compensation. Interestingly, nearly half would also consider quitting because they don't feel appreciated by their employer.

Winter says the survey demonstrates a different view from the "millennials lack commitment" narrative offered in HR circles, one that she sees at Capital One.

"Millennials are looking for that commitment and are content to stay where they are for the next two to three years," she said. "They're looking for what most of us want, which is to be engaged, involved, feel like their contributions make a difference and focus on learning and development."

The survey also found that people are less focused on titles. Only one in 10 Canadians put a promotion at the top of their wish list. A sense of belonging and being part of something positive outweighed the need to get ahead and have a more impressive title.

Winter was unsurprised with this finding as well: "Where we work is a big part of our personal identity and people take a lot of pride in that."

HR SUCCESS

Capital One was named one of the 2014 50 Best Workplaces in Canada by Great Place to Work. The key to this success can be summed up in one word: flexibility.

"The benefits and perks that are offered within an organization need to flex with the employees as the demographic changes," said Winter. "The needs of someone in her 20s will be different than a baby boomer's. There needs to be flexibility and options."

That often translates into putting more choice into employees' hands. At Capital One Canada, from choosing how, where and when employees work to helping accommodate a healthy work/life balance to learning opportunities that mesh with personal goals and learning styles, Winter says the company strives to adapt to the individual.

"We recognize that these are people with lives outside of work and we are very flexible about how people accommodate their own needs," she said. "There's less of a focus on hours and work location and more on outcome and great results and making sure they are recognized."

That recognition is also a cornerstone to the company's employee engagement successes. Winter says milestones are regularly celebrated and employees are empowered to take recognition into their own hands.

In their two Canadian call centres, employee engagement scores soar and they enjoy a very low turnover. She credits peer-to-peer recognition as one of the leading factors to that success.

"Associates can give small recognition awards to their peers who are doing an awesome job on the phone when they hear it in the moment," said Winter. "A \$10 gift card can mean a lot when it comes from a teammate."

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Internal communications are also integral to a strong workforce. An intranet with social media-like features is well used and helps connect employees between Toronto and Montreal for collaborative brainstorming sessions.

The physical work environment also plays a part.

"We're very conscious about creating a work space where people can be at their best," said Winter. "Depending on the work they do, we make sure they have the right set-up."

Agile workspaces, such as portable white boards and desks and tables that can be moved, help create spaces where work can be completed efficiently and comfortably. An abundance of natural lighting, spaces where people can come together informally and quiet places for contemplative work are also freely available.

"We look at HR as enablers to create momentum. It's critical to think through the experience that you want your employees to have and create that value proposition," said Winter. "It's not about having a big budget and doing big splashy things; it's about creating an energy."

Winter is quick to point out that HR can't create the environment without executive sponsorship and champions from leadership. She says the president of Capital One Canada reads every single comment from their biannual survey and the feedback influences their people priorities for the coming year.

However, the ownership over the culture of a workplace belongs in the hands of the employees.

"Networks, forums, special interest groups – employees feel they're shaping a great culture and environment here. It's theirs, and not the company's.

"The business leadership team needs to feel ownership of workplace satisfaction and the role of the HR practitioner is to be a steward of those efforts."

With such an adaptable and supportive workplace culture, it's understandable that the company's employees want to stay right where they are. ■