

Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award Winners

By

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The winners of the 2007 Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards were honoured recently for their efforts to create psychologically healthy policies and programs in their organizations.

From large to small, the seven B.C. organizations that were selected from 14 nominees, all demonstrated excellence in caring for staff, whether through providing comprehensive training initiatives or developing thoughtful work-family-life balance policies. This two-part series examines just what got these winners their awards. They offer lessons for all organizations. This week we look at the larger winners.

British Columbia Automobile Association

In the Sponsor-Applicant Category (nominees who sponsor and are nominated for the award), British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA) won in the large-for-profit category for excellence in Employee Growth and Development.

BCAA, probably best known for helping motorists in a jam, also provides travel and insurance services to over 765,000 members throughout BC and the Yukon. They make continuous learning, training and development one of their core values. The company doubled the number of training hours it offers employees from fewer than 20,000 hours in 2001 to over 40,000 hours in 2006.

Employees can take advantage of classroom courses in coaching, emotional intelligence, performance management, presentation and leadership skills to name a few. And an eight week sales training course helps retain new hires in the sales department. BCAA makes a direct link between its increased operating revenue growth (from \$89 million in 2003 to \$115 million in 2006) and the leadership and sales training it offers staff.

A key plank in the BCAA learning strategy is its mentorship program for staff and leaders. Staff are paired with a mentor in management to meet as often as weekly for six months. During this time, staff create an individual learning plan and work towards its completion. The same program is offered to managers who are matched with a member of the senior management team.

Vancouver International Airport Authority

Vancouver International Airport Authority (YVR), a winner of the 2004 Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award and a Sponsor-Applicant, was

nominated in the large-not-for-profit category and claims the award for excellence in its work-family-life balance programs.

YVR manages, operates and develops Vancouver International Airport and places a premium on wellness, physical activity and family balance. Its Fitness and Balance Wellness Program enjoys a participation rate of 50 per cent, up by 17 per cent since 2001. In addition, YVR holds “lunch and learns” on topics such as nutrition and stress as well as conducting health assessments, medical and dental check-ups and offering incentives to quit smoking.

Employees and their families have access to an Employee and Family Assistance Program for counseling and can take advantage of flexible work hours and job sharing. Also, parents are offered up to two years leave on top of maternity or parental leave to care for babies and young children.

Attending to staff work-family and life balance has resulted in a healthier workforce with fewer injuries. In 1999, YVR saw 222 days lost due to injury for 300 employees while in 2006, this number dropped to 32 days lost, despite an increase in number of employees. Staff are sick less, and maintain an average attendance rate of 97 per cent in 2006. The turnover rate is 5.9 percent which means YVR tends to keep its employees.

WorkSafeBC

Tied with YVR in the Sponsor-Applicant category is WorkSafeBC, a large-not-for-profit organization demonstrating excellence in Healthy and Safety. WorkSafeBC promotes workplace health and safety for employees and monitors compliance with the Occupational and Health and Safety Regulation. The company’s health and safety programs include generous benefits packages as well as access to an Employee Family Assistance Program. The company also houses a wellness program and a commitment to promoting safe and healthy work stations. For example, every employee has access to a work station ergonomic assessment.

Much of WorkSafeBC’s health and safety programming is employee driven. Staff receive training in how to best manage their safety and can affect company policy. Employees were behind a cell-phone-free driving policy at the organization, for instance. WorkSafeBC’s efforts are paying off in fewer days lost to injury (down by 80 percent from 2001 to 2006) and higher service ratings. Employers (WorkSafeBC’s clientele) assigned the company 8.6 out of 10 on quality of service to injured workers. By creating a culture of wellness at WorkSafeBC, the organization ensures that its focus on health and safety elsewhere is taken seriously both inside the organization and outside of it.

These three companies have demonstrated leadership in promoting psychological health in their workplaces in the areas of employee growth and development, health and safety and work-family-life balance. By focusing on

these elements of psychological health, BCAA. YVR and WorkSafeBC strive to create workplaces where people want to come to work.

Next week: a look at the balance of the award-winners and their winning workplaces.

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