

BCAA declared a great place to work

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Besides being a good bet for travel insurance or packaged vacations, the B.C. Automobile Association is also a great place to work, according to an organization that promotes psychologically healthy workplaces.

The Psychologically Healthy Workplace Collaborative [PHWC] honoured seven B.C. organizations Thursday for policies, programs and practices that contribute to the psychological health of their staff. BCAA, with 1,300 employees across the province, won the award for employee growth and development in the large, for profit, sector.

"We had 14 high-calibre nominees," Jennifer Newman, registered psychologist and PHWC chairwoman said in an interview.

"And the decision was very difficult, because we decided from the best of the best," added Newman, who co-writes a biweekly column for the Vancouver Sun's Working section. "All the [award winners] are leaders in B.C. in the creation and promotion of psychologically healthy workplaces."

Newman said PHWC concluded that BCAA truly values staff development.

"What really stood out was that [BCAA] makes continuous learning, training and development a core value," said Newman. "A unique program is their mentorship program for leaders and staff. Staff are paired with a manager and they meet regularly to work on their goals. And managers are paired with senior management to work on personalized goals. And it's fantastic."

Other winners are: Vancouver International Airport Authority (for work-family-life balance); WorkSafeBC (health and safety); Vancouver Community College (employee recognition); Westminster Savings Credit Union (work-family-life balance); Executive Strategies (employee involvement); and Cariboo Chilcotin Child Development Centre Association [employee growth and development].

BCAA human resources director John Allen said in an interview that he was thrilled with the award. "We put a lot of energy into employee development and growth opportunities as well as employee wellness programs. And about four years ago, we really ramped it up."

Allen said that since then, BCAA has seen double-digit growth in revenues and profits each year. "Employee engagement and morale definitely contributed to that."

Newman said providing psychologically healthy workplaces is not only ethical, but also plays a role in a stronger bottom line. Turnover, absenteeism and sick leave are lower in healthy workplaces, she added.

As well, Newman said, such benefits as flexible work weeks or telecommuting options often work wonders for staff morale.

YVR, another winner, offers benefits such as:

IMAGES



Stuart Davis, Vancouver Sun
BCAA employees play an interactive board game about annual corporate goals.

- A fitness and balance wellness program, which includes the yoga classes as well as other fitness activities.
- "Lunch and learn" sessions, where employees have the opportunity to listen to experts on such topics as nutrition, stress management and posture.
- Incentives such as gift cards for personal improvement.
- An Employee and Family Assistance Program, which provides employees with confidential, professional assessment, guidance and counselling.
- Flexible work hours for people to shape their lives around personal commitments.
- Up to two years' leave on top of maternity or parental leave.

According to YVR, these and other programs have helped the airport authority achieve an average attendance rate of 97 per cent in 2006, meaning only three per cent of employees' total hours were booked off for sickness.

The Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award was founded by the American Psychological Association in 1999 and brought to Canada in 2004, with B.C. the first province to offer it in Canada.

Past B.C. winners include Vancity, YVR, Petro-Canada Burrard Products Terminal and Ainsworth Lumber Company.

The award is open to all B.C. companies that address one of five criteria for a psychologically healthy workplace: work-family-life balance, employee involvement, employee recognition, employee growth and development, and health and safety.

More information is available at www.phwc.ca.

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