

Ten Ways To Keep and Attract Your Staff



**COMMUNITY
COUNCIL**

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Labour Market **Dialogues**

TAPPING INTO THE HIDDEN LABOUR MARKET

TEN WAYS TO KEEP AND ATTRACT YOUR STAFF

The Labour Market Dialogues	2
25 Employers of Choice in BC's Capital Region	4
1. Refunding staff bus passes	
JB Group Auto Parts	6
2. Hiring people with disabilities through an agency	
Peninsula Co-op	8
3. "No resumé required"	
Value Village	10
4. Condensing the work week	
Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre	12
5. Improving work-life balance for parents	
Spectrum Job Search	14
6. Providing the training employees need	
Viking Air	16
7. Addressing an increasing family need: Elder care	
EDS Advanced Solutions	18
8. Giving a little, getting a lot	
Royal Bay Bakery	20
9. Hiring Aboriginal youth	
Adriana's Cocina Mexicana.....	22
10. Welcoming workers from all generations	
Il Terazzo Ristorante	24
Community-based employment agencies	26
Our research methods.....	27
Acknowledgments	28

THE LABOUR MARKET DIALOGUES

The labour market continues to challenge employers in British Columbia's Capital Region. Staff and skill shortages have been documented, discussed, and analyzed by economists, human resources specialists, and many other experts.

The Community Council's Labour Market Dialogues has explored ways to support Capital Region employers in hiring and retaining people who are experiencing barriers to employment. (For more information about the Labour Market Dialogues, please see our website: www.communitycouncil.ca/initiatives/lmd.html)

Over the course of the three phases of the project, we have consulted with more than 100 local employers from different sectors and of different sizes. The two strategies identified as having the most potential to benefit both employers and employees were:

- supporting people in the transition to employment
- offering flexible schedules.

Transition supports assist people with barriers to employment in entering the workplace; offering flexible schedules is a simple and cost-effective way to help them stay and succeed in the workplace.

In the third phase of the Labour Market Dialogues, we looked at the successful hiring and retention strategies of 25 employers of choice in the Capital Region, in order to understand their successes and share their stories with other employers.

This booklet summarizes the work of 10 of these employers. Choosing 10 was not an easy task, as all of the employers who participated have exemplary practices and are using innovative strategies to address their staffing needs. We therefore based our selection on:

- the two strategies with the most potential to benefit both employers and employees – supporting the transition to employment and offering flexible schedules
- representation from different sectors and sizes of businesses, and
- practices that are transferable to many businesses.

WHAT WE MEAN BY BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

In the Labour Market Dialogues, “barriers to employment” are issues that present people with obstacles to finding and keeping work. Barriers to employment include (but are not limited to):

- being homeless
- having substance abuse issues
- having mental and physical health problems
- having a low level of life skills
- having a criminal record
- lacking work history
- being a sex worker
- having a history of violence and abuse
- being new to Canada
- not speaking English
- being a single parent
- discrimination
- illiteracy
- poverty.

Most people experiencing barriers in one of these areas also experience barriers in at least one other area.

The ten stories in this booklet have been numbered for easy reference only. They are listed in no particular order.

25 EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE IN BC'S CAPITAL REGION

The following 25 employers let us look closely at their hiring and retention practices, in order to understand their success and share their stories with other employers. We are very grateful for their assistance.

An employer of choice is a business or organization chosen by job-seekers because of its capacity to provide a work environment that attracts and retains talented workers.

Abstract Developments Ltd.
Adriana's Cocina Mexicana
Better Business Bureau
City of Victoria
Clean Conscience
Commissionaires
Compass Group Canada
Delicado's Oak Bay
Dumont Construction Services
EDS Advanced Solutions
Hemp and Company
Il Terrazzo Ristorante
Island Displays
JB's Downtown Auto Supply
Juan de Fuca Recreation Center
Level Ground Trading
Peninsula Co-op
Canadian Red Cross-BC Coastal Office
Royal Bay Bakery
Rusnak Gallant Limited
Spectrum Job Search Society
SportChek
The Joint Pizzeria & Deli
Value Village
Viking Air

REFUNDING STAFF BUS PASSES

JB Group Auto Parts refunds the cost of the bus pass for 10 of its employees. For many people in the Capital Region, this may represent the wages of one full day of work. For businesses like JB Group, bus passes can be claimed as a business expense and are tax deductible.

In the summer of 2008, when gas prices were going up and JB Group staff were discussing alternative transportation opportunities, Operations Manager Alex Wade set up the process.

Refunding staff bus passes is a great employee incentive.

It's simple: Staff bring in their expired bus passes at the end of the month, and receive a refund from the company, which they use to buy their next month's pass.

This represents a double advantage for employees. Not only does it save them \$75 each month, but it also reduces their overall transportation costs, since the passes can be used for personal transportation needs as well.

There is also an environmental benefit. "This is a way to encourage a 'green' lifestyle for employees," Alex says. Imagine more and



more people using the public transportation system and leaving their cars at home!

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – Easily fits into current business processes (for example, can be paid out of petty cash and written off as a business expense)

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Gives low wage earners a break (potentially increasing retention)
- Reduces the company's environmental footprint

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Provides a cost-savings (\$75 a month)
- Eliminates the need to bring cars to work
- Bus passes can be used outside of work

HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH AN AGENCY

John Ferguson, Manager of the **Peninsula Co-op Commercial Cardlock** in Saanich-ton, knows that employees are actively being sought by all businesses. Retaining employees in jobs that are difficult to fill – like the cleaning position at the cardlock – can be a particular challenge.

John tried hiring youth for the job, but they didn't last long because they found it boring and not enough of a challenge. Now he contacts the Community Support Team, which

Creating a \$500/month position for a person with disabilities fills a niche in the workforce and helps employers that are understaffed.

provides employment counselling and other services for people with developmental disabilities. People with disabilities can earn up to \$500 per month without losing their disability benefits.

John describes the skills that are needed, and a caseworker from the agency visits the work site and then provides a list of potential employees. Once the employee is hired, the caseworker spends two to three days training him or her, and then visits regularly to see how the employee is doing.



The arrangement has worked well. “The employees have flexible hours and can work at their own pace,” John says. The opportunity to work, earn some money, and be more independent and self-sufficient often gives them new confidence. And the cardlock is kept clean.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – The agency provides a list of potential employees to consider, trains employees and then supports them in the job

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Reduces hiring costs
- Recruits part-time help for tasks that take other employees away from more critical tasks

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Provides a flexible workplace for someone who only wants to work part time
- Improves quality of life and the work environment

“NO RESUMÉ REQUIRED”

At the heart of **Value Village’s** success in attracting and retaining employees – especially those with many barriers to employment – lie a number of innovative strategies.

A banner hangs outside the store inviting people to apply for positions – no resumés required. Inside the store there is a table where people can apply for jobs on the spot.

Value Village job coach Skyler McClelland works closely with employment agencies to

Welcoming diverse applicants who are highly motivated brings richness to the workplace

find potential employees. For example, he recently attended a job fair organized by the employment services of Experience Works (Silver Threads), and hired two team members as a result. He has also set up an online application process at Spectrum Job Search that allows applicants to submit their applications to Value Village by fax or email.

In addition, flexible scheduling has allowed the store to tap into the local hidden labour market, accessing highly motivated workers who prefer part-time schedules and a willingness on the part of employers to accommodate their need for flexibility.



In today's labour market, employers need to be prepared to change their hiring and retention practices, says store manager Rick Elliot. "And if you don't hire people quickly, they might not be available tomorrow!"

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – Flexible scheduling is easy to implement, although it requires more employees on staff and the scheduling itself takes time

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Helps reduce turnover and increase loyalty
- Encourages cross-training, giving employees more opportunities to learn and bring diversity to the job

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Allows employees to balance work with other needs, such as school, medical appointments, and family
- Enables employees to work through different stages in their lives, and to leave and come back as needed

CONDENSING THE WORK WEEK

The **Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre** was dealing with a high turnover rate in maintenance and cleaning positions, especially during the night shifts. To make these positions more attractive, West Shore Parks and Recreation proposed that the night shift be adjusted from a regular full-time schedule to a compressed schedule, with four 10-hour shifts per week – an employee’s suggestion. The union representing staff at the recreation centre (the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 1978) agreed to a six-month trial period.

Managers listening to and implementing staff suggestions improves productivity

A few changes have been made to improve the new system. For example, workers returning from sick leave who have difficulty returning to a compressed work week are able to work reduced hours until they feel fit to work a 10-hour shift again.

“Staff retention, staff morale and productivity have all increased, and absenteeism has been reduced,” says Debbie Hansen, Human Resources Manager at the recreation centre. More importantly, it is no longer such a struggle to find cleaning and maintenance staff for the night shift – a definite cost-savings.



With the practice now being used in two other organizations with the same union, this is a great example of union and management working together for the benefit of both employer and employee.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – It takes 3-4 months to agree on conditions and implement the schedule

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Increases staff retention (with reduced training and recruitment costs), morale and productivity

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Increases time away from work (better work-life balance)
- Helps reduce night shift fatigue

IMPROVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR PARENTS

Almost half of the 34-member staff at **Spectrum Job Search** work part time. Some are attending school, and others have their own businesses – but the main reason for working part-time is to meet family needs.

“When the life part of work-life balance is taken care of, employees are less stressed,” says Executive Director Sheila Walker.

Spectrum began to create part-time positions and provide flextime in 2007 to accommodate

Part time work can be an option for parents of young children who need to balance work and family needs

an employee returning from maternity leave. The manager suggested that she start working only three hours per week, and increase the hours according to her parenting needs. The results were positive, and the arrangement is now offered to all staff members who are parents or are adjusting to a transition in their employment.

Human Resources Manager Rosie Manhas spends a third to half of her time adjusting the work schedules of her staff. “Spectrum wants to ensure that staff are stress-free, productive and not looking for other work while at work,” Rosie says.



Accommodating the work-life balance needs of staff ensures that Spectrum has the staff it needs to run the business and provide clients with excellent service.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST
Medium – Managing schedules and shared office space costs more in terms of administrative time
BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increases retention• Increases employee satisfaction and productivity
BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps improve work-life balance, especially for parents• Gives employees the sense that the employer really cares about them both at work and outside of work

PROVIDING THE TRAINING EMPLOYEES NEED

For **Viking Air**, providing employees with the specific training they need was a significant investment. “But your employees are the ones making and selling your products!” says Human Resources Assistant Carrie Broadhead. “How can you lose on that?”

The alternative was to wait six months and recruit local college graduates who had completed the introductory sheet-metal technician program. But demand for the company’s products was high, and the company designed its

With the right training and mentoring support, young people can learn to build the products in no time

own innovative training program, “The Viking Academy.”

The program welcomes candidates from all generations, including young people (“Generation Y”: 16–23 years old) with some experience working with their hands and an eye for detail. They are given an aptitude test, and must show a willingness to learn and enjoy working in a team.

On completing the program, graduates start out assisting a skilled employee. Because they work so closely together, the skilled tradespeople play a mentoring role, allowing new



employees to learn quickly and move up in the company.

The investment has paid off, with Viking Air increasing the quality of their products and keeping up with the demand.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

High – Training investment is \$6,000 per student, although it would also have cost the company money to wait for college graduates

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Attracts applicants
- Improves training, since people are trained on the company's own equipment
- Reduces turnover (currently the lowest it has ever been)

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Working with skilled staff allows new employees to learn quickly and move up in the company
- With training provided, employees are paid to learn a trade
- Helps skilled workers focus on their jobs, while supported by entry-level staff

ADDRESSING AN INCREASING FAMILY NEED: ELDER CARE

“I want employees to know it’s okay to ask for help,” says Greg Conner, Vice President of Human Resources for **EDS Advanced Solutions**, a large company in the high-tech industry.

With the aging population, where three out of 10 people over 65 require some form of special care and assistance, employees increasingly need time off to provide care for aging parents or other relatives. EDS Advanced Solutions’ elder care policy, which is simple

Making employees eligible for the company’s elder care leave policy when the need arises

and easy to implement, allows employees who are dealing with a family care issue to take the time they need.

Giving employees the time to focus on their immediate family helps the company avoid “presenteeism” – being at work but being distracted or stressed by personal concern or family issues. It took EDS only a month to write the elder care policy, receive support from the union, communicate it to staff and implement the policy.



Greg sees this as a case of the Golden Rule:
“If this were your situation, you would want the organization to do the same.”

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – Took only a month to develop and implement the policy

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Reduces high cost of training and turnover
- Supports hiring people with families because they are more likely to stay in the job and grow with the company
- Shows employees that it's okay to ask for help

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Meets employees' need for scheduling flexibility when elderly family members need care, especially in difficult, long-term situations or when periodic issues arise

GIVING A LITTLE, GETTING A LOT

Providing flexibility in the work schedule has great benefits for a small business like the **Royal Bay Bakery** in Colwood. “We have people around us who we can trust and who stay,” says owner David Grove.

Because their needs are accommodated – for example, by allowing staff to pick up children from school or daycare, and then come back to complete a shift – Royal Bay Bakery has employees who not only want to stay, but are also willing to go the extra mile for the busi-

Building a sense of community with a “human touch” can start with providing a flexible work environment

ness. If there is a big rush, for example, employees will stay to lend a hand, even if they have finished their shift. The impact of such a simple strategy in the workplace has been remarkable.

Having a group of long-term workers has multiple benefits. The skills needed by the business stay in the business. Customer relations are improved, because employees are typically local and rooted in the community. And the employees know each other, trust each other and help each other. All David has to do is to sit down with each employee and go through the shift calendar until all the gaps are filled.



David differentiates the “human touch” in his bakery from the experience in larger and more complex businesses. “It’s a better experience for the people who work here, for me, and for the community.”

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Medium – If staff are not available, the owner has to work overtime

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Increases retention
- Builds trust
- Builds loyalty – employees are willing to go the extra mile
- Makes the business feel like it is truly part of the community

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Allows employees to attend part-time school and work full-time during the summer, without stress, or to pick up children from school and then return to work
- Makes employees feel they are being treated with respect

HIRING ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Adriana Ramirez, owner of **Adriana's Cocina Mexicana**, used to drive past the ŁÁU, WELNEW Tribal School in Brentwood Bay every day and think to herself that it would be good to work with Aboriginal youth. She eventually approached the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC), and an employment counsellor came to visit her restaurant soon after, to learn about the employment opportunities Adriana could offer. Before long, two Aboriginal youth were working in the restaurant.

Providing Aboriginal youth find a great way to get that so elusive first work experience

Having the support of the VNFC has been a great advantage for both Adriana and the youth, especially those who are working for the first time. "They have someone they trust, who knows how to help them get started, with things like transportation subsidies and a clothing allowance," Adriana says. As for the employer, VNFC services are free, advertising costs are reduced, and the time associated with finding and screening applicants is eliminated.

Now, when Adriana needs a new employee, she talks to the employment counsellor about what she is looking for, and a match is found



from the network of job seekers at the VNFC. Once hired, the youth are provided with orientation and counselling, and are visited by the employment counsellor to make sure things are working. It's a simple but effective way of reaching Aboriginal youth.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Low – VNFC services are free; training costs would be the same for other employees

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Reduces cost of finding and screening applicants
- Contributes to the community

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Helps youth find their first jobs
- Employees have their first job with someone who their job counsellor knows and has matched with their interests
- Employees have support from both the employer and the agency counsellor

WELCOMING WORKERS FROM ALL GENERATIONS

For **Il Terrazzo Ristorante** manager Terri Jones, the solution to the tightening labour market was simple: “Beat it or meet it.” When the restaurant adjusted wages to attract and retain their staff, things began to improve dramatically.

In addition to competitive wages, Il Terrazzo now provides a consistent work schedule for mature servers. This has had a great impact on morale, as they feel their employment is more secure. Besides, when younger workers

Combining a range of practices has proven pay off - staff from different generations feel welcomed and appreciated

are hired, mature staff take on a mentoring role, which in turn contributes to increased staff loyalty and a positive work environment.

Rewarding loyalty also became an important goal, and Il Terrazzo now offers full benefits – medical and dental – to employees who have been with the restaurant for three years. The costs are covered by the resources that would otherwise be used to hire a Human Resources person to deal with the high and costly turn-over rate in the restaurant industry. Five staff currently receive the benefit package.



Employee loyalty, pride and a sense of ownership lead to consistency and excellent service, which is what customers want. “Promote loyalty,” Terri advises. “It will help you keep your sanity.”

WHAT ARE THE COSTS AND BENEFITS?

COST

Medium – Resources used for benefits would have otherwise gone to an HR person

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYER

- Having loyal employees creates a good and respectful work environment

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Medical and dental benefits
- Working evenings
- Stability

COMMUNITY-BASED EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Of the 25 “positive deviant” employers that participated in the project, 10 were working with the support of a community-based employment agency or program. The agencies and programs we encountered are:

- Hard Hats (GT Hiring Solutions)
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- Community Support Team (Community Living BC)
- Experience Works (Silver Threads)
- Crews@Work
- The Futures Club
- WorkSource Wage Subsidy Program
- Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre.

The main role of these agencies and programs is to refer candidates to local employers and provide follow-up support in various forms: facilitating resumé-writing, providing counselling and orientation, and/or providing financial subsidies for clothing and transportation. Some also provide supervision.

While the role of most agencies and programs is limited to providing supports for employees, some also provide employers and their staff with support and orientation. For example, the Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre provides information and brochures on how to communicate with a person with a hearing loss.

We encourage you to find out more about the community-based employment services organizations in your community. They can become an important ally in addressing the hiring and retention needs of your business.

OUR RESEARCH METHODS

In our research we used an approach known as “positive deviance.” This approach is based on the idea that in every community there are individuals (“positive deviants”) whose special practices and strategies enable them to find better solutions to prevalent community problems than their neighbours, who have access to the same resources. We found our “positive deviants” by asking around: we asked business associations, such as the Better Business Bureau and the Downtown Victoria Business Association, employment agencies, and employers to refer us to employers who are using innovative hiring and retention practices.

We also used a second approach, called “appreciative inquiry,” in designing our interviews with employers: rather than focusing on the difficulties clients have had in finding and keeping work, or the difficulties employers have had in finding and keeping employees, we focused on successes. For example, we asked employers about their experience in hiring people with barriers to employment and what had been the best thing about that experience for them.

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The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag above the letter "a".The logo for Vancity, featuring the word "Vancity" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

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