



Team culture pays dividends at Western Financial

'We don't look at this as a place to work, we see ourselves as a family'

By Todd Lewys - Photo by Darcy Finley

For over 21 years, Western Financial Insurance Company has been Canada's only licensed insurance company that focuses on pet health insurance.

As a niche service provider, you don't last for over two decades unless you're doing something right.

Western Financial's President & CEO, Randy Valpy, says a surprisingly simple fundamental has laid the foundation for the success of the company, one of Manitoba's Top 25 Employers for 2011.

"First and foremost, we try to select the right employees," he says. "We give people the opportunity to learn about us. Then, we see if their attributes make them someone who'll fit within the dynamics of the company.

"It's very much a team culture here so we really want to make sure we choose people who will be a good fit for that culture and, equally important, that for perspective employees we are a company that they want to work for."

While all too many companies rush new employees to the front lines with a minimum of training, Western Financial isn't one of them. In Mr. Valpy's mind, taking the time to provide employees with the tools they need to succeed is well worth it.

"All of our employees go through extensive training which takes four to six weeks to complete. That way, once they hit their desk, they'll feel confident they know about the company and what we expect them to deliver to our customers. The training prepares them to engage our customers with confidence and a high level of product knowledge."

As thorough as the training program is at Western Financial, there are inevitably going to be times when an employee has a question that only a manager can answer. Consequently, the managers at Western Financial go out of their way to make themselves accessible.

"We make a point of having each employee meet every manager and executive," Mr. Valpy explains, adding that all managers keep

their doors open to encourage dialogue. "They also take the time to give a presentation about their roles so our employees know exactly who they should go to if they have a question.

"At the same time, our managers and executives convey the message that our employees have an important role in the company - that we couldn't succeed without them."

That commitment to communication doesn't stop there, he adds.

"In my opinion, you can't communicate enough or show your appreciation to your employees enough. With that in mind, we hold a state of the company address every quarter. We go over financials, as well as our successes and challenges," Mr. Valpy says.

"I think this is essential because our employees need to see where our management team is coming from. I'm proud to say about 75 per cent of our employees take the time to come to these quarterly addresses."

More than anything, Western Financial's management team wants its employees to know more about business skills when they leave than when they started.

"Our goal is to educate our employees, so we invest heavily in them," Mr. Valpy says. "I've spent 30 years in business and have really come to appreciate the employers who taught me something that I could take forward with me to my next job or just in daily life. That's what we try to do for our employees."

Although training plays a central role in the success of any company, the atmosphere that permeates a company determines how well (or poorly) employees perform at their jobs.

Mr. Valpy says you have to know when to take your foot off the gas pedal, too.

"As focused as we are on success, we also believe in having fun. Work can be stressful, so we provide our employees with a break room that has computers where they can access the Internet, as well as a TV they can watch to disconnect a bit and refresh themselves," he says.

"Our new building, which we hope to finalize shortly (with up to 80,000 square feet of space), is even going to be outfitted with a fitness facility."

To encourage a family atmosphere in a company of 117 employees, various events are held on a regular basis to foster a cohesive environment.

"We hold barbecues in the summer and potlucks in the winter, and have events like 'bring your pet to work for the day' to lighten things up," Mr. Valpy says. "And we also encourage our employees to volunteer for the Winnipeg Humane Society whenever possible.

"We don't look at this as a place to work, we see ourselves as a family. It's all about mutual respect, with everyone getting along and no one above another. We want our employees involved, so we try to recognize our employees and show that we appreciate their efforts."



From left, Western Financial's Glenn Williams, VP Operations, Fred Horbaty VP Finance and CFO and Randy Valpy, President and CEO.



We answer to some pretty demanding

VIPs

(Very Important Pets)

At Western Financial Insurance Company, we're proud to be one of **Manitoba's Top 25 Employers!**

We offer excellent remuneration, benefits and added perks too! If you speak to our diverse team of over 100 people, they're likely to tell you about our unique members-our **VIPs!**

The one driving belief we all share is the importance of insuring pets across Canada, so that pet parents can afford and have access to the very best veterinary care available.

For more information about a career in pet health insurance, visit us at www.westernfic.com



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