



Money can't always buy

the right

# stuff

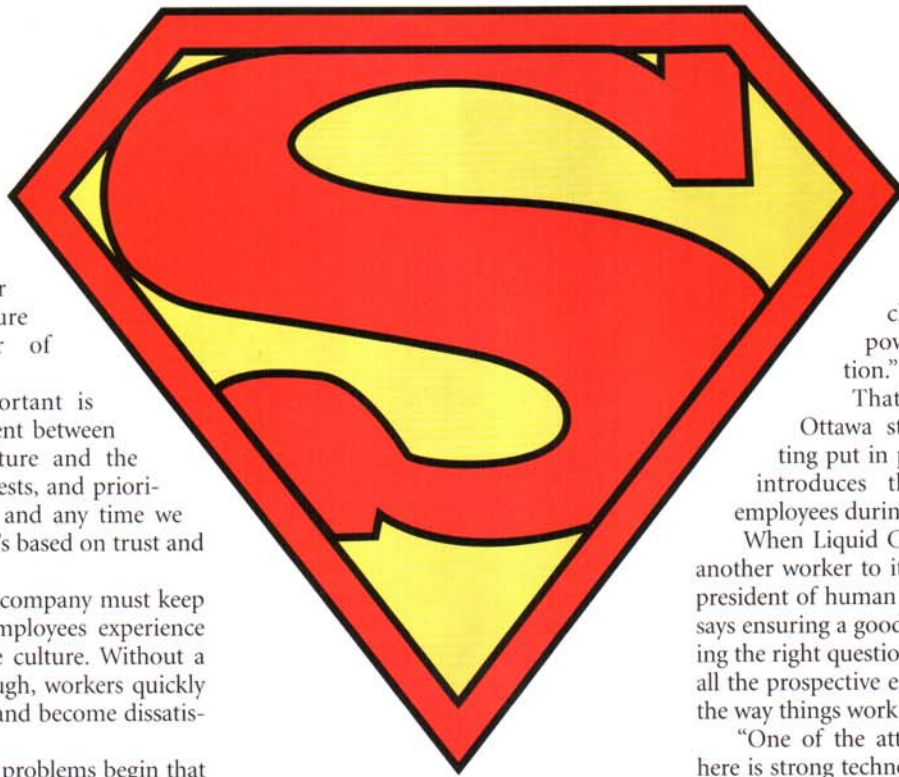
Liquid Computing may take a colourful approach to recruiting, but when it comes to screening applicants it's down to business in terms of finding the right people with the right stuff.

**By Jeff Pappone**

A generous salary certainly gets people's attention and will entice workers to join a company, but employers banking on engagement ending with a good paycheque risk an unhappy staff at best and failure at worst.

There's no doubt monetary rewards play a central role in workers' decisions to take a job or stay at a company. And, while nobody wants to feel undervalued when they head to the bank, employers must remember that workers have hearts and minds as well as pockets.

"Money can't sustain people," says Anita Caputo, a coach, motivational speaker and



management trainer with the Big Picture Institute and author of *Promote Yourself*.

"What's really important is there has to be alignment between the organizational culture and the employee's values, interests, and priorities. It's a relationship, and any time we have any relationship, it's based on trust and respect."

And that means the company must keep its word and ensure employees experience the promised corporate culture. Without a committed follow through, workers quickly see the inconsistencies and become dissatisfied.

When that happens, problems begin that often reach down to the bottom line. So, it's in the managers' best interest to ensure that they make a concerted effort to ensure their employees are engaged.

"The real responsibility of a leader is to create an environment where employees can thrive and when that happens, the whole sense of accountability comes alive," says Janice Calnan, author of *Shift: Secrets of Positive Change for Organizations and their Leaders*.

"When that happens, productivity, innovation and commitment also come to life and profits increase."

It's a simple equation: someone heading to work to repeat the same dull routine everyday will not be happy about being there. That feeling spreads quickly throughout the organization, sapping productivity from the equation day after day.

The key to turning things around is a leader who "walks the walk" and demonstrates the culture by his or her actions, says Ms. Caputo.

"He's the guy who's going to drive the vision and the direction of the company," she says. "It's key that the leader not only have the vision, it needs to be communicated throughout the company, right down to the grassroots."

But, while it's up to the leader to break old thinking patterns and bring a new vision to the table, they need buy-in from the rank and file to bring permanent change. No matter how determined, no leader can change company culture by edict alone.

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"It starts at the top, because that's where the decisions are currently made. But if you continue to hold all the decisions at the top without bringing commitment from various levels, it's a hard job," Ms. Calnan says.

"Nobody can make another person change, but if you create an environment

where they want to change, now you have power in your organization."

That's an approach that Ottawa startup Liquid Computing put in place from day one and introduces the idea to potential employees during the interview process.

When Liquid Computing looks to add another worker to its roster, company vice-president of human resources Mel Mulligan says ensuring a good fit comes down to asking the right questions, while also answering all the prospective employee's queries about the way things work.

"One of the attractions that we've got here is strong technology. Because we are in computing, they know it's going to continually evolve, so it's going to be interesting, state of the art, and challenging," he says.

"We also go out of our way to provide strong ongoing and open communication, so the second reason someone comes here is the people. Money needs to fall further down the list."

Prospective employees who identify money or "a job" as their motivating factor for a move to Liquid Computing often find the interview ending quickly.

During interviews, the company offers a list of statements that describe the kind of culture that it would like to promote and a two-page information sheet that illustrates the differences between working for a startup and an established company.

The list of statements, known as "the Zen of Liquid," helps the interview subjects understand the company's culture and helps ensure the decision at the end of the process will be positive for both parties.

The 16 points in the list refer to the importance of such things as building a cohesive team, work-life balance, open communication, and finding ways to get the job done.

Despite these kinds of concerted efforts, getting employees engaged remains a tough order for most businesses.

Gallup Consulting has done extensive research on the topic. A 2003 survey found that only about 29 per cent of workers in the U.S. feel engaged at work. Conversely, just more than half of workers – 54 per cent – feel

“not engaged,” with the remaining 17 per cent saying they were “actively disengaged” at work.

“It doesn’t surprise me at all,” Ms. Caputo says about the Gallup results. “If you are absolutely, totally engaged, you are feeling motivated, productive, interested, you can’t wait to wake up in the morning to go to work, and you are healthy in mind and spirit. How many people are that excited about their work?”

Disinterested workers should be a huge concern for businesses, since Gallup’s research also shows that engaged workers deliver increased quality and productivity, better customer focus, and usually exhibit higher retention rates.

The challenge for management is to create a culture and work environment where people feel good about themselves. And a large part of that equation is always providing the right feedback.

“Of course it’s not always going to be positive because we do make mistakes. But it’s how you handle those mistakes,” Ms. Caputo says.

“On the positive side of things, a simple ‘thank you’ goes a long way. On the flip side of things, we need to see mistakes as learning opportunities and experiences rather than career limiting moves.”

In addition, satisfaction surveys and personalized interviews can be openers that will lead to meaningful conversations that will build trust and respect. This can later serve as the foundation for future engagement.

“It’s all around managers being able to influence people’s attitudes and behaviours in a very positive way,” Ms. Caputo says. “If they are able to do that, then they will have a positive influence on morale and therefore on satisfaction, which leads to employee engagement.”

And, although many managers feel that there are factors outside their control that motivate employees, their day-to-day behaviour has a huge impact on satisfaction, Ms. Calnan adds. “They genuinely need to care about the workers, because the bottom line is it brings results and customer satisfaction.”

While Mr. Mulligan couldn’t conclusively say that Liquid Computing’s engagement efforts had increased retention, he feels the program keeps workers at the company’s Ottawa headquarters more satisfied, which leads to greater productivity.

“Our turnover is probably about average and we do have people who move on for other opportunities and we understand that,” Mr. Mulligan says. “But we have had a very good record in terms of not making a mistake in each other when we bring people onboard.”

One way Liquid Computing rewards workers is with stock options, but they are not given to employees as incentive to join the company.

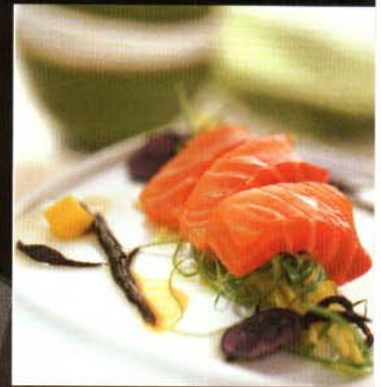
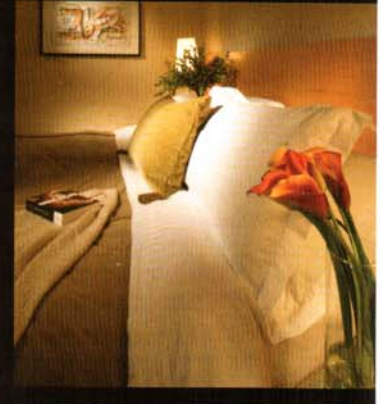
Performance-based stock options help recognize contributions without taxing the company’s limited resources, which sometimes rules out pay raises.

Mr. Mulligan feels stock options are different than plunking down a \$1,000 bonus because they will only have future value if everyone works together and achieves their goals as a team.

“Every employee can make a difference. All of this is about setting expectations about the culture we believe is important to ensure success,” he adds.

“And success includes all stakeholders: employees, investors, customers, and partners, and if one of them is not happy, then we have a problem.” ●●●

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