

NEWS

Is Conference Board study a fair assessment?

Employees are never 100 per cent productive. For most organizations the cost of doing business includes employing human beings with flaws

HANNA DUNN

HUMAN CAPITAL



Recently, the Conference Board of Health Canada completed its report for Health Canada on the cost of employee smoking. Annual costs have gone up from \$2,565 (1997) per smoking employee, to \$3,396 in 2006 – although part of this increase is attributed to increased wages / salaries.

Most of the cost stems from decreased productivity due to smoke breaks. (This assumes that people are not discussing work issues during smoke breaks and are therefore unproductive during this time.) As a footnote, there are no increased health insurance costs to employers because insurance carriers do not collect smoking data.

It is estimated by Health Canada that 22 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women smoke. Based on those numbers, if you employ 100 people, with a 50/50 male/female split, approximately 20 people within your total workforce will smoke.

This will cost you approximately 20 x \$3,396 = \$67,920 per year.

Is it just me?

I'm having trouble getting excited about

the above numbers. Also, the implication of focusing on smokers scares me a little.

Don't get me wrong – I understand that smoking is bad and there are costs associated with it. But aren't there costs for all employees? Don't we all have our habits, behaviours, problems, or idiosyncrasies that ultimately cost our employers?

I should declare my bias: I am a former smoker (who quit a decade ago) and several people who are near and dear to my heart still smoke. They know their habit is ill-advised and unhealthy, but it is what they do.

The Conference Board report briefly mentions that there are other lifestyle and health issues that are likely costing employers

money, such as obesity, lack of exercise, unhealthy eating, and stress.

I have a few more costly habits to add to the list: people who talk too much, colleagues who are always late for meetings, and employees who arrive late in the mornings.

Or what about people who are less productive because of troubled marriages? Or children who kept them up at night? Or insomnia? Or hypochondria?

I would speculate that there must also be a cost to employing people who make slower decisions, don't resolve conflict well, can't concentrate, or have a lower IQ...or EQ.

I could go on and on.

The smoking cost is so measurable and easy to be self righteous about because clearly it is a bad idea. But aren't the rest of us "guilty" of one or more of the other productivity drains mentioned above? If I'm honest, there are two on the list that I would have to admit to. (I'll let you guess.)

Employees are never 100 per cent productive. For most organizations the cost of doing business includes employing human beings with flaws. Flaws that we can not ask about during an interview and that, frankly, are often none of our business. I have yet to meet a perfect employee who doesn't "cost" in some way.

Perhaps you know of one. If so, please write to me.

Hanna Dunn is president of Dunn & Winfield Group Inc. and has been a human resources professional in Mississauga for 20 years. You may write to her at hannad@dunnwinfield.com or visit www.dunnwinfield.com for more information.

Metroland adds to its growing group of newspapers

Last month, the Mississauga-based media giant, Metroland Printing, Publishing & Distributing Ltd., (owner of the Mississauga News and Mississauga Business Times), added CityMedia to its family.

Torstar Corp., parent company of Metroland, announced that such legendary titles as the Hamilton Spectator, Kitchener-Waterloo Record and Guelph Mercury would be part of the amalgamation.

"These properties will nest nicely into the Metroland footprint," said Murray Skinner, president of Metroland, from his offices on Wolfedale Road.

Not only has Metroland added some "fabulous" newspapers, but they are in successful markets contiguous to the chain's existing papers, said Skinner, adding the company will change its name to Metroland Media Group (MMG).

The reorganization will plump up the Metroland chain by about 35 per cent. "From an administrative point of view, this streamlines things and makes the decision-making process simpler," said Skinner.

The Toronto Star remains a separate division of Torstar. The changes will strengthen the newspaper businesses and provide opportunities for expansion, added Robert Pritchard, president of Torstar. "Our mission is growth, creating opportunities, launching new papers, new products, new innovations," he added.

In addition to more than 100 community newspapers and the CityMedia dailies, Metroland also publishes Sing Tao and three commuter dailies in Toronto, Vancouver, and Ottawa.

Foodpath and Enersource come up with a bright idea

Last month, clients of Foodpath in Mississauga received energy saving compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) as part of a conservation initiative sponsored by Enersource Hydro Mississauga. While distributing over 800 energy-efficient light bulbs in the one week blitz, students from the utility's community events team also offered energy saving advice to clients as they moved through the busy Foodbank.

"The support of companies like Enersource is critical to our operations as we don't receive any government monies," said Anne Hunter, executive director of Foodpath. "We rely on charitable donations and our own fundraising initiatives to pay for our programs."

"This type of initiative helps us reach low-income residents so they too may lower their bills and contribute in a meaningful way to conserving electricity", said Gunars Ceksters, president and CEO of Enersource.

"We're pleased to help start the CFL bulb conversion process in the homes of those who quite understandably may have higher priorities with their income – simply making ends meet at the supper table." Foodpath (Interfaith Peel Association to Tackle Hunger) provides food to approximately 40 non-profit organizations (www.foodpath.org).



In the photo are volunteers Alyson and Jennifer displaying energy efficient CFL bulbs distributed at the Mississauga west Foodpath location. To the right are Enersource Senior Manager Ken MacDonald and Foodpath Director of Operations Dawn Pullar.



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