

“FROM THE MOMENT WE HEARD RUMBLINGS ABOUT THE PANDEMIC, I REALIZED IT’S GOING TO BE OUR PURPOSE THAT GUIDES US THROUGH THIS. WE DIDN’T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, WE JUST KNEW WE HAD TO KEEP OUR PEOPLE SAFE AND WE WOULD GET THROUGH IT TOGETHER. – JILL WAGMAN, MANAGING PRINCIPAL, ECKLER LTD.

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Staying true to the culture course

THRIVING
Continued from FP7

“These two things are correlated. This performance reflects our culture, the diversity of our franchise, and the robust demand for our products and services,” says Gori. “We are a better, stronger, more resilient company because we prioritize our people and encourage them to be the best versions of themselves.”

ARTICULATING
PURPOSE AND
CULTURE TO DRIVE
DECISION-MAKING
TODAY AND
TOMORROW

Mid-Market award winner Eckler Ltd. is Canada’s first and largest independent actuarial consulting firm. Its culture of trust has long been a proven differentiator for the private professional services firm competing for clients and talent against large multinationals.

Culture at Eckler starts with the recruitment process, which is focused on finding people who are self-motivated, seek out opportunities and want the freedom to pursue work they are passionate about. It is reinforced by professional development opportunities and a compensation structure that help support performance. “We’re not a high-touch, high-oversight organization. Our people understand the responsibility that comes with that freedom and find it empowering,” says managing principal Jill Wagman.

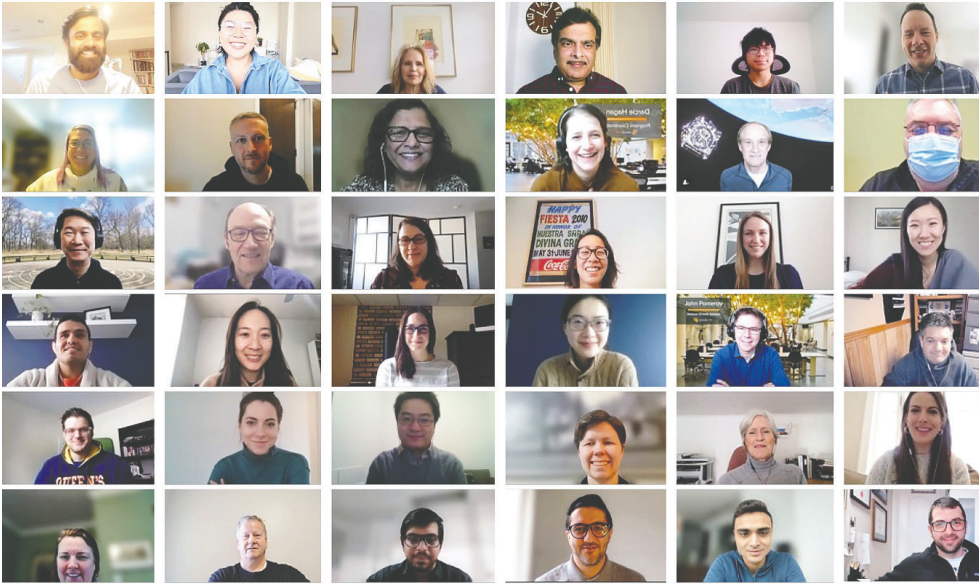
In 2019, Eckler decided it was time to capture and articulate its collective why. Owners and staff of the 330-person firm engaged in facilitated story-telling exercises to unpack their purpose. “They shared what made them proudest of working with Eckler. Some stories were related to what the company achieved, but more often it was about how the company treated them or others in situations of need or challenge,” says Wagman. “This led to our purpose statement: To care and to do right by people so that together we can achieve a brighter, more secure future.”

The timing could not have been better. “From the moment we heard rumblings about the pandemic, I realized it’s going to be our purpose that guides us through this,” says Wagman. “We didn’t know what was going to happen, we just knew we had to keep our people safe and we would get through it together.” The firm did more than get through the pandemic, it thrived.

That clear understanding of purpose continues to guide all decision-making and strengthen the culture. “The next five years are going to be really telling,” says Wagman. “We will probably have to do more and more to keep our culture strong and enrich it.”

CRAFTING THE
CULTURE THAT IS
GOING TO HAVE THE
BIGGEST IMPACT ON
PERFORMANCE

Growth category winner StarFish Medical is Canada’s leading medical device design, development and contract manufacturing company. Perhaps its biggest design project is the way it embeds culture in its systems in foundational ways. “Once you get the right underpinnings, it’s like a spiral going up. Culture reinforces. If you get the wrong things, the spiral goes downward,” says founder and



Top photo: Staff gathering at StarFish Medical; middle collage: Eckler Ltd.; bottom collage: ventureLAB. SUPPLIED

CEO Scott Phillips. The process started about 15 years ago with a deep dive into what made the company’s top performers successful and what StarFish could do to recognize and amplify those behaviours to create the culture it wanted. This led to a list of guiding principles designed to drive toward innovation: dig deep and solve the right problem, cut to the chase, get better, be transparent.

Equally important and a critical value is creating the opportunities for people to do the best work of their lives. To this end, the company created its Superpowers program. “We have monthly meet-ups and talk to managers about their team’s superpowers and how we can start incorporating recruiting questions for specific roles based on the superpowers of their best performing people,” says Pamela Potts, people and culture director. “For example, project manager is a key position for us. Problem-solving and creativity are two of the superpowers people in that role have.”

StarFish also launched the SMART program (StarFish Managers: Acting, Reflecting, Transforming) to support all levels of management in ensuring culture drives performance.

“It’s a year’s worth of re-

flecting and sharing leadership learning,” says Phillips. “As we grow, we want people to grow. We can only win together.”

The company has achieved double-digit growth each year over the last 10 years. Phillips has also created an aspirational goal the firm calls 100 x 100: to help 100 clients achieve \$100 million market valuation. StarFish has helped 12 of its customers achieve this benchmark so far. Says Phillips: “I believe if we can achieve our financial value goal we’ll also touch the lives of 100 million people.”

ALIGNING
INDIVIDUAL AND
ORGANIZATIONAL
PURPOSE AND
MEANING

Small batch gelato brand (and one of the Emerging category award winners) Righteous Gelato’s founder and CEO James Boettcher has a clear north star: to build a company you want your mom or dad to work at. “As an employer, as, essentially, a custodian of people’s lives, I play an active role in their lives. It’s not just about compensation. Money is a requirement, but there is the additional element of happiness, pride, belonging and safety,” he says. “I believe the workplace has

to serve the person first, and then in turn the person will serve the workplace.”

To ensure Righteous Gelato serves its people, Boettcher has doubled down on its key mechanisms. The Righteous Culture Book is an 80-page document that shows exactly how culture is embedded in all aspects of operations and guides all behaviour. As part of the recruitment process, candidates are asked “what’s important to you?” Each employee has 20 hours of paid charitable volunteer time. “This is a tremendous attraction to the people who share our DNA,” says Boettcher. During the onboarding process, he personally thanks each new hire. “When you start a relationship with an appreciation like that, you open the possibility of an authentic relationship.”

The company also uses Latrice, a people management software program, to monitor and build engagement. Every two weeks, team members are surveyed about how they are being recognized at work, how they are being understood. “We take it from a feeling to something we can audit and have discussions about,” says Boettcher.

When the pandemic started, the manufacturer doubled down on its “gotta go” policy, where anyone

who did not feel well for any reason (mental as well as physical) could take paid time off and production was postponed as needed. The company has since earned some of its highest employee satisfaction and loyalty scores.

MAKING A
HIGH-PERFORMANCE
CULTURE A STRATEGIC
OBJECTIVE

Not-for-profit innovation hub, and one of 2021’s Broader Public Sector award winners, ventureLAB is on a mission to build globally competitive tech titans that build to scale in Canada. It does this by helping founders raise capital, develop talent and commercialize technology and IP.

In 2019, under the leadership of president and CEO Melissa Chee, ventureLAB took the steps to answer the question: How do we create an organization that is performance-driven and culture-based?

“We gathered with the team to define the culture we want,” says COO Matt Skynner. That culture is RIVIR: Relentless, Inclusive, Visionary, Innovative and Results-focused.

To institutionalize these behaviours, ventureLAB built culture into its performance management process. “Our goals are evenly split between culture and business objectives,” says Skynner. “Everyone is evaluated on RIVIR. Did they increase the net promoter score for clients? Did they help clients raise capital?”

The performance management process itself is embedded in how leadership and their teams create objectives. “Every year, we do a strategic planning process,” says Skynner. “Each person on the team creates their own strategic implementation plan that aligns with the overall strategy and vision for ventureLAB. This creates more buy-in and accountability, and gives the management team the tools to reinforce the culture.”

The company also has regular town halls that start by talking through RIVIR and include culture check-ins with team members sharing a win they had, a shout out for someone on the team, and the behaviours that helped them achieve as well as outlining a challenge and how to do better. Wins, challenges and shout-outs are also part of weekly department meetings. “Embedding the culture in this way helps sustain it,” says Skynner.

It also drives impact. “We are trying to help companies create jobs, generate revenue and raise capital. From 2019 to 2021, the jobs within the companies in our program tripled, revenues went up by a factor of five, capital raised increased by 10 times. We would not be where we are without the culture we have created.”

CANADA’S MOST
ADMIREDCEOs AND
CORPORATE CULTURES
2021

CEOs

- Enterprise** John Ferguson, President & CEO, Purolator (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Mid-Market** Wayne Chiu, Founder & CEO, The Trico Group (Calgary)
- Growth** Judi Hess, CEO, Copperleaf (Vancouver)
- Emerging** Zak Hemraj, Co-founder & CEO, Loopio Inc. (Toronto)
- Broader Public Sector** Michael Lavis, CEO, Creative Options Regina (Regina)
- Transformational Leadership** Lori Nikkel, CEO, Second Harvest (Toronto)

ENTERPRISE

- Bayer Canada (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Compass Group Canada (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Corus Entertainment Inc. (Toronto)
- goeasy Ltd. (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Hershey Canada Inc. (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Ledcor Group of Companies (Vancouver)
- Longo Brothers Fruit Markets Inc. (Vaughan, Ont.)
- Manulife (Toronto)
- Mattamy Homes (Toronto)
- OpenText Corporation (Waterloo, Ont.)

MID-MARKET

- BlueShore Financial (North Vancouver)
- Book Depot Inc. (Thorold, Ont.)
- Eckler Ltd. (Toronto)
- Endy Canada Inc. (Toronto)
- KUBRA (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Nicola Wealth (Vancouver)
- Nordia (Laval, Que.)
- Penguin Random House Canada (Toronto)
- Questrade (Toronto)
- SCI Group Inc. (Toronto)
- Securiguard Services Limited (Vancouver)

GROWTH

- BOWEN Group, a division of Agilus (Calgary)
- Copperleaf (Vancouver)
- Cowan Insurance Group (Cambridge, Ont.)
- Financeit (Toronto)
- Helcim (Calgary)
- Mitsubishi HC Capital Canada (Trois-Rivieres, Que.)
- Molded Precision Components (Oro-Medonte, Ont.)
- Security Compass (Toronto)
- Sharethrough (Montreal)
- StarFish Medical (Victoria)

EMERGING

- Accent Inns Inc. (Victoria)
- Corporate Finance Institute (CFI) (Vancouver)
- FISPAN (Vancouver)
- Impetus Digital (Toronto)
- Insurance Insight Inc. (Oakville, Ont.)
- Jan Kelley (Burlington, Ont.)
- Klue (Vancouver)
- Litco Law (Calgary)
- RFP Design Group Inc. (Mississauga, Ont.)
- Righteous Gelato (Calgary)

BROADER PUBLIC
SECTOR

- Alberta Blue Cross (Edmonton)
- City of Surrey (Surrey, B.C.)
- Halton Healthcare (Oakville, Ont.)
- Lakefield College School (Lakefield, Ont.)
- Medavie (Moncton, N.B.)
- Opportunities NB (Fredericton, N.B.)
- Plan International Canada (Toronto)
- SE Health (Markham, Ont.)
- St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton (Hamilton)
- ventureLAB (Markham, Ont.)