

**Healthy, wealthy.** Proponents say fostering a healthy workplace isn't just good for staff, it's part of doing business in smarter, better ways.

# A pursuit of excellence

Ask workplace expert Stan Murray why companies should foster healthy work environments, and he can't help but respond rhetorically, albeit politely, "That's like asking, 'Why should companies earn money?'"

Murray, the soft-spoken director of the National Quality Institute's Healthy Workplaces programs, is also quick to caution, "If your company is only interested in wellness and lifestyle practices – it's missing the boat."

The NQI, a not-for-profit created by Industry Canada in 1992, helps organizations achieve excellence.

"A strategic focus on excellence goes beyond products and services. Companies that strive for excellence are trying to improve quality of life – for the company and its employees."

Calian's Ottawa-based Business and Technology Services Division is among the companies that have bought into NQI's concepts and are reaping the benefits.

With annual revenues exceeding \$150 million and a workforce of over 2,200, Calian is a leader in its field. "Our total focus is on people," says company vice president and GM Tom Coates. "We want to be the best company to work for, buy from and invest in."

He explains the rationale, "If we look after our people, they look after our customers. If our customers are happy, that will look after our investors. People come first."

Perhaps what makes Calian's approach and success even more impressive is they stem largely from how the company effectively dealt

with its growing pains.

"In 2001, we had purchased a number of companies and had challenges integrating them. We needed to increase our productivity and quality of work," says Coates. "We decided to start from ground zero in how we run this company."

Calian looked to NQI's four-step Progressive Excellence Program for guidance.

Murray says, "A lot of organizations have good intentions, but find themselves moving in too many directions. We align initiatives so they work to the same goal."

For example, Murray says implementing a decision matrix that considers employees is an important step. "How will our decision impact overtime, stress, the health of our employees," says Murray, noting, "The decision is free of charge. The problem with many organizations is one department spends the dollar and another reaps the benefit, so there is a perceived cost centre."

The solution, he says, begins with senior management buy-in. "Then it's a business decision and an obvious cost saver."

While Calian has implemented a number of programs that benefit its staff – everything from help on smoking cessation to

financial planning to getting involved in local charities – the key, says Coates, is it's the employees who choose what's important.

"All of our programs are actively managed by employees. They decide what is meaningful to them. We adjust the activities accordingly."

The upside for Calian? "There are a lot of non-financial and financial benefits. We have a great working environment, great morale, great communications – the work gets done," says Coates, noting, "Over the

past four years, we've averaged 2.5 sick days annually per employee."

In 2006, Calian's efforts earned it rank among NQI's Canada Award for Excellence winners, garnering Calian a Gold Award for Quality and a Silver Award for its Healthy Workplace.

Murray says there are many good reasons to make workers a priority, not the least of which is that a positive workplace helps attract, retain and motivate staff.

"Happy employees are more creative, resilient and productive, and that impacts the bottom line in positive ways. There is a direct link to competitiveness," he says. ■

## The last impression

Instilling a positive, healthy workplace is part of a proven method of achieving organizational excellence. In companies that pursue this path, senior managers accept that investments in employees ultimately save costs. To ensure companies realize maximum return on their HR investments, managers are also wise to consider how they can ensure their employees' appearance conveys the quality and excellence the company stands for. To learn more visit [www.imagegear.ca](http://www.imagegear.ca).