



The following case study was produced as part of the research report "Success Themes in Supportive Employment". Copies of the full report are available online: http://www.socialenterprisecanada.ca/en/learn/nav/SET_Report.html



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THE CLEANING SOLUTION

Overview

The Cleaning Solution ("TCS"), a non-profit social enterprise, is a contract cleaning company that provides supportive and quality employment to people living with mental illness. By providing purpose, responsibility and involvement in the workforce, TCS enables its employees to overcome stigmas and build confidence, increase their capacity and skills, and pursue career advancement.

Background

TCS was initially launched with the support of the Canadian Mental Health Association ("CMHA") Vancouver Burnaby Branch through their Consumer Run Business program, now known as Social Enterprises Services. After launching two other social enterprises, CMHA used a grant from Enterprising Non-Profits to undertake planning for a new cleaning business, working with a core team of four individuals living with mental illness. Once TCS was incorporated as a non-profit society in 2004, the enterprise was incubated at the CMHA office.

TCS has grown steadily each year since, both in terms of number of employees and earned revenue. In 2010, the enterprise moved away from CMHA's incubation into its own space in downtown Vancouver.

The organization's key employment goals are to:

- Provide employment to work-ready people living with mental illness
- Offer career advancement and nurture leadership potential
- Focus on the employee's preferences, skills and abilities
- Retain and sustain a stable workforce

Target Population for Employment

TCS's employment hiring practice requires that a minimum of 60% of its employees have a diagnosed mental illness. As of Q4 2013, the enterprise employed 68 people,

of whom 42 (62%) are people who have battled mental illness. 36 are part-time or casual workers.¹

Target employees are eligible to fill any type of role at TCS, from service work to administration and management. In other words, there are no designated jobs for target employees; the most qualified person is selected for each role, as long as the enterprise stays within its hiring mandate.

In terms of employment, many TCS employees previously faced stigma associated with their mental illness, resulting in inconsistent work histories and gaps in their resumes. Some lack adequate training and education. Other barriers to employment faced by TCS target employees include poverty and homelessness or risk of homelessness.

HR Practices

Recruitment and Hiring

TCS is part of a community of organizations serving individuals living with mental illness. They largely recruit target employees through referrals from these community partnerships, and also post open positions on their website.

Prospective employees need to be qualified (pre-trained) for the job before they are hired. For cleaners, this means they need to have either accreditation in commercial cleaning or experience.

Once they have screened prospective employees, TCS uses mainstream interview and hiring practices.

Orientation

TCS's Employment Support conducts an orientation session with new employees to acquaint them with the organization. The session includes a review of TCS's Employee Policy Manual, a comprehensive 29-page booklet that includes the organization's employment policies and practices, standards of conduct, wage and salary policies, information on benefits, and a section on employee communications. The majority of the policies outlined would be found in any mainstream company, with few exceptions (e.g, the Pets in the Workplace policy, discussed in the Employment Supports section below).

The orientation session also includes a review of TCS's history, core values, vision, mission, goals and objectives. The new employee's supervisor presents them with all security codes, keys, equipment, and procedures needed to navigate within the workplace. The supervisor also introduces them to other staff, reviews their job

¹ Demonstrating Value Performance Snapshot, Q4 2013

description and scope of position, explains TCS's evaluation procedures, and helps the new employee get started on specific functions at the client site.²

Most new members of the cleaning staff are assigned to one site at first, and receive orientation around that site. Depending on how much work they want and are able to handle, they may gradually be assigned more sites over time.

Training

All members of TCS's cleaning staff must have received training in Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) before they are hired or by the end of their three-month probation period. In accordance with best practices, WHMIS training should be refreshed every three years, so TCS runs a training session every year to ensure that all of its employees are upgraded regularly.

TCS also provides biohazard training for employees who work in semi-public sites such as employment centres, daycare, et cetera, and provides a refresher course on a three-year cycle as well.

Performance Evaluation

The Employee Support program estimates employees generally need about three months to settle into their job. The Employee Support Coordinator works with the employee to design a wellness plan shortly after his or her start date, then conducts a performance review after the successful completion of their 3-month probationary period. (See more about wellness planning in the Employment Support section below.)

TCS uses standard employment practices around promotions. Compensation and benefits of individual staff are reviewed annually with each person's annual performance evaluation, or as part of the Operating Budget process.

Uniform and equipment

TCS provides employees with branded shirts, which they are required to wear while at client sites to identify them and to contribute to an increased sense of teamwork.³ Employees are entitled to between one and three uniforms at no cost, depending on the number of shifts they work, and are reimbursed \$6 per shirt per month for laundering costs. Shirts must be returned at the end of employment.

TCS also requires employees to wear non-slip closed toe footwear, long pants, slacks or jeans in good repair, and any other safety equipment required by government regulation. The company does not provide these items.

² TCS Employee Policy Manual Section 3.3 – November 2012

³ TCS Employee Policy Manual Section 3.4 – November 2012

TCS provides all cleaning supplies and equipment.

Scheduling and accommodations

“Accommodation is *how* we run our business – it’s not a duty, but our competitive advantage,” explains Shaugn Schwartz, TCS’s Executive Director. To stay within their allowable earnings through Disability, most target employees can only work an average of 14 hours per week. TCS assigns work to each employee based on these limits, taking into account the employee’s capacity and interest (in some cases, employees choose to work more), as well as client demand.

Because most of TCS’s target employees are returning to work after long absences, Employment Support works with them to gradually increase the amount of work assigned to them; overloading an employee with too much work from the start risks setting them back, and having an employee on medical leave can be a heavy cost for the enterprise. It makes more business sense, then, to provide a gradual re-entry to the workforce, monitor performance, and schedule accordingly. This level of accommodation is part of TCS’s Employee Assistance program (described in more detail below).

Wages and Benefits

TCS has a policy to pay a minimum of 15% above minimum wage.⁴ The enterprise uses a rigorous salary grid to determine base salary ranges for all positions, and to guide salary reviews for existing employees. Total compensation is based on a 37.5-hour week, and includes benefit plans, professional development opportunities, and paid time off.⁵

Leave of Absence

TCS’s Long Term Sick Policy is intended to provide employees who are unable to work as a result of illness and/or injury to take time off from work and return when ready. Employees who present a doctor’s certificate may take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from the date of illness and/or injury. Those who are unable to return to work after 12 weeks are released from employment, but are welcome to re-apply when they are ready to work again.

Tenure

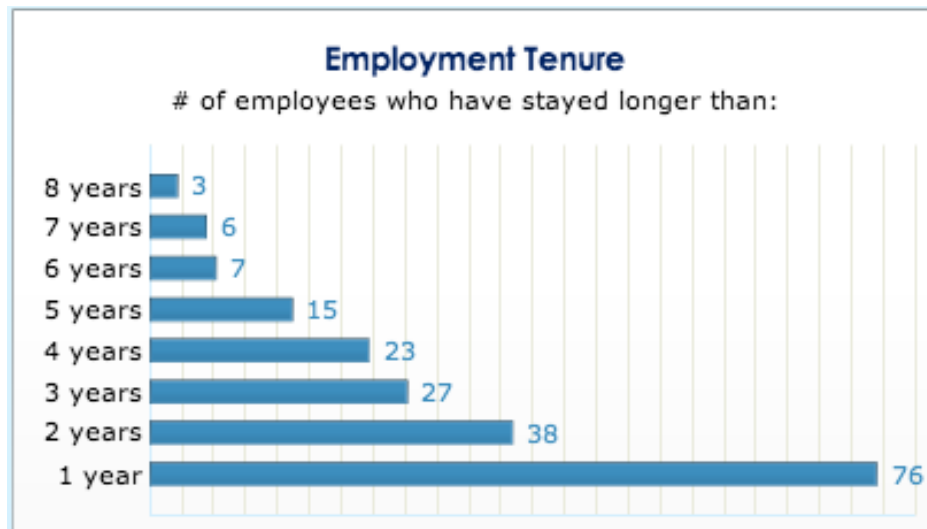
TCS has an 85% retention rate, remarkably high for industry standards. Employees leave TCS for a number of reasons, including mental health relapses or other personal reasons, not finding a good fit, other job opportunities or retirement.

Below is a snapshot of employment tenure:⁶

⁴ The Cleaning Solution Story – September 2013, pg. 26

⁵ TCS Salary Grid and Review Policy, January 2012

⁶ Demonstrating Value Performance Snapshot, Q4 2013



Employment Supports

The services provided by TCS's Employment Support Program are central to the success of employees staying employed. The program provides activities, programming and support that engages employees, promotes their health, increases confidence and self-esteem, and provides advocacy in matters that relate to their well-being and success at work.

The person responsible for overseeing the Employment Support Program works 20 hours per week (.6 FTE), and is responsible for overseeing the ES Program. In addition to administering some human resources initiatives, such as recruitment and hiring of people living with mental illness, Employment Support conducts regular individual and group support sessions with staff. An administrative coordinator handles other HR tasks and non-target hiring.⁷

Employee Assistance

One of the fundamental supports TCS offers its employees is *wellness planning*. Wellness planning involves employees meeting with Employment Support at the start of their employment and on a continuing basis, to identify behaviours, to acknowledge when they are feeling unwell, and if unable to work, create an appropriate back-to-work plan. The wellness plan is a key tool used to manage the health and safety of employees; it identifies supports, community resources, and a plan if they become symptomatic.

⁷ The Cleaning Solution Story – September 2013, pg. 19

Employment Support also helps employees to manage life events that could impact their ability to stay employed. Other key elements of the TCS Employee Assistance program include:

- *One-on-one employment support*, which includes advocacy on issues that may affect an employee's employment;
- *Critical Support*, to provide assistance when an employee is suffering a financial hardship and needs support for necessities. Employment Support assesses need on a case-by-case basis.
- *Bio/Psycho Programming*, providing activities and opportunities that will benefit the physical and emotional health of employees. These activities are developed in consultation with employees and are offered individually and in- group settings.

Employee Incentives

TCS recognizes employees for their commitment and hard work at the workplace. The incentive portion of the Employment Support Program promotes employee engagement and motivation, and acknowledges employees for the following:

- A cash bonus for excellent performance based on site evaluation scores (awarded three times per year);
- A near cash bonus for zero complaints from a jobsite over a four-month period (awarded twice annually);
- A near cash award for perfect attendance over a six-month period (awarded annually); and
- Budget permitting, staff will receive a performance-based holiday bonus, taking into consideration fourth quarter evaluations, as well as their attendance over the year (awarded in December).

Employees that meet all criteria for the incentives receive an award at the year-end staff party.

Professional Development

The Professional Development initiative provides funding for management and administration to access training, workshops, programs and conferences that directly relate to their work within the organization. These dollars are meant to increase the skills and capacity of employees to perform their duties and take on additional roles or tasks.

Community Building and Staff Recognition

In the summer of 2007, TCS employees went to see a Canadians (Minor League Baseball) game. The event and following BBQ was a huge success. This event was organized in response to the desire of employees to connect with each other and senior staff. In distributed work sites, employees could go for weeks without knowing other employees, being in touch with the office via telephone and having regular contact primarily with supervisors. The high turnout and response from

employees started the tradition of employee events and made community building a key aspect of TCS's human resource policy.

Holiday events are also a key part of the employment support model. Often people who have experienced significant mental illness also experience a loss of close personal relationships. Holidays can be a difficult time for TCS employees and, consequently, people are at a higher risk of getting sick. In celebrating birthdays and holidays, TCS is not only looking after employees, but also helping the business by preventing employee absenteeism.

TCS currently maintains a budget for Staff Recognition to fund and acknowledge occasions such as:

- Birthday gifts (up to a \$20 non-cash gift per employee)
- Recognition Lunches (for successfully completing probation or celebrating an anniversary date with TCS)
- Summer Party (BBQ event, baseball game and lunch)
- Year End Party (Christmas party and Year End Awards)
- Year-end Annual Awards (Cleaner of the Year, Sparkle and Shine, Perfect Attendance, Silence is Golden)
- Social Events (Thanksgiving Dinner, Open House, staff get-together and engagement events)
- Miscellaneous (acknowledgement of weddings, deaths, births, etc.)

Pets in the Workplace

TCS has a policy to provide a workplace pet-friendly management framework that recognizes human health as being paramount. According to the Employment Policy Manual, "TCS recognizes the special relationship between people and pets. Arranging pet care can be expensive and leaving a pet at home alone for long periods of time can cause the pet and owner undue stress. Allowing pets in the workplace demonstrates [sic] TCS's commitment to our employee's mental health (and their furry friends) and reinforces our friendly, comfortable office environment."⁸

Pets are only allowed at TCS's administrative offices, not at client sites.

Community Supports

TCS's target employees are supported by a network of community agencies, including CMHA Vancouver Burnaby Branch, that provide services for people with living with mental health issues.

⁸ TCS Employee Policy Manual Section 3.7 – November 2012

TCS also collaborates with Quest Food Services for employees to access low-cost foods. People living with mental illness often live in chronic poverty, which can be a significant risk factor for poor physical and mental health. This program provides opportunities for employees to access food at affordable prices and provides education in areas of healthy nutritional practices.

TCS employees have the opportunity to sign-up through Quest for 'Community Training Kitchen' workshops. These workshops provide nutritional education on subjects such as best shopping practices, menu planning, and how to prepare and cook healthy and wholesome meals.

Challenges

Like any other company, the biggest challenge for TCS is to stay viable; that is, it must find clients and compete with other mainstream companies for business. Beyond that, TCS faces several challenges that are uniquely tied to its employment mandate:

- **High administrative costs.** With more than 75% of TCS's employees working a part-time schedule due to Disability benefits restrictions, administrative costs are higher than they would be with more full-time employees. More people mean more payroll, more orientation sessions, and more administration in general. A higher level of administrative effort is also required to create work schedules that are flexible and accommodate employees' needs (including wellness requirements).
- **Staffing for business management.** TCS must compete with the private sector for managers who not only have strong business acumen, but are also committed to their social mission and are willing to work at nonprofit salary rates.
- **Funding.** TCS does not have consistent, stable funding for their Employment Support program, which to date has not been fully covered by operating income.
- **Pre-employment support.** Not all candidates who are referred by recruiting agencies and meet target qualifications are qualified for the jobs, highlighting the importance of finding the right fit between people who need work and the needs of the business.

Cost of Employment Support

Through carefully managed growth, TCS has expanded steadily each year since its first full year of operations in 2005, when it had five employees and \$20,000 in earned revenue. The company earned over \$988,000 in 2013.

There is no formal board policy regarding a percentage of revenue that should be spent on employment support, but the enterprise has generally spent roughly 6-

10% of its revenues each year on the Employment Support program. In 2013, TCS spent just over \$36,000 on employment supports. Costs broke down as follows:

- Counseling: \$12,367
- Employee Incentives program: \$6,549
- Employee Assistance program: \$3,051
- Professional Development: \$2,070
- Staff Recognition: \$4,658
- Evaluation & Planning: \$3,843

In each year since it was founded, TCS has relied in some part on grant funding to subsidize its employee supports and to break even, though it usually makes up less than 10% of the annual budget. TCS also relies heavily on volunteer support, with six Board members and numerous expert volunteers acting as advisors over the years. Office volunteers help to ensure administration duties run smoothly.

Employment Outcomes

Benefits to employees

Through an annual employee survey, TCS tracks employees' movement over their tenure in terms of these indicators:

- Current levels of social connectedness, positive self-esteem, belonging, healthy living, happiness, resilience, empowerment, and autonomy; and
- Whether they perceive increased standard of living, improved wellness, and success at work as a result of employment with TCS.

Employees have reported many of these positive impacts. For example:

- 80% of employees say that working at TCS has contributed positively to their overall health and well-being;
- 79% say that that acknowledgement for workplace success enhances their motivation; and
- 92% say that they are well-equipped with knowledge and skills that help them succeed at work, contributing to increased opportunities at work to learn and grow.⁹

Others have reported the benefits of having independent income apart from social assistance, an improved standard of living, better self-care, and a feeling of connection with, and giving back to, the community.¹⁰

⁹ Demonstrating Value Performance Snapshot, Q4 2013

¹⁰ "Wellness Through Photovoice: The Role of Social Enterprise," by Christa Mullaly, 2012. (Mullaly is a former TCS employee who completed this study capturing TCS employees' experiences for her Masters Degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University.)

Above all, TCS provides individuals recovering from mental illness with a path back to the mainstream workforce, enabling them to re-build their confidence, sense of purpose, and quality of life.

Benefits to the enterprise

TCS benefits from a 15% turnover rate average – well below the janitorial industry, which estimates between 75%-400% turnover on an annual basis. Much of this can be attributed to the enterprise's pro-active approach to wellness, but there may be an underlying reason as well. "Because [our employees] have experienced so much stigma, they are very loyal once given a chance," says Schwartz. "They feel they are understood, so they tend to stay."

Key Takeaways

TCS succeeds in achieving its employment mandate due to a number of different factors.

- TCS provides employment that is a good match for the challenges faced by their target group. "Independent work is a good fit [for people with mental health issues]– the physicality of the work, working alone with little supervision, and being given independent responsibility," says Schwartz. The work is flexible, part-time, and not overly social.
- TCS has an employment specialist whose role is to provide support to employees. Before they could afford to hire a specialist on their own, TCS partnered with another social enterprise to share one person in this role, demonstrating the importance they saw for Employment Support, even when funding wasn't sufficient to cover it.
- TCS has benefited from the passionate commitment of a core group of founders, staff and board. TCS's incubator relationship with CMHA Vancouver Burnaby allowed it to grow slowly until it was able to stand on its own.
- TCS's structure as a non-profit society allows them to bring in expert advice at the Board level, and has allowed them to apply for grant funding.
- TCS has recognized that it is in its own best interest to offer opportunities for recognition, celebration and community. The business thrives when employees are well, and for people facing mental health issues, community connection is a large part of wellness.
- TCS learned early on that potential customers weren't buying their mission; rather, they were looking for competitively priced high quality cleaning services. TCS has succeeded largely because of its ability to focus on growing the business side of the enterprise, particularly around sales and marketing.

As Schwartz points out, the provision of employment itself is 90% of the benefit to TCS employees. "Nothing is more important than providing work to people who have experienced stigma. So the fact that we do it is success."