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# ENHANCING THE RETAIL EXPERIENCE

*Mercedes-Benz Burlington Is An Award Winning Corporate Environment.*

By: Erica Nelson

Most people have a goal of creating a career for themselves that does not feel like work; an environment where employees do not need to depend on a yearly vacation for a break. Perhaps a place that is complete with an on-site spa, a movie theatre, driving range and full-service café that serves freshly-prepared meals daily. Few companies can provide all of this to their employees, but among them is Quantum Automotive Group and the Mercedes-Benz dealership in Burlington, ON.

This luxury car dealership has just been placed in the Waterstone Human Capital's Top Ten most Admired Corporate Cultures of 2014. The award is given based on strict criteria in the areas of vision and leadership, recruitment and hiring for fit, cultural alignment and measurement, retention, rewards and recognition, organizational performance and, finally, corporate social responsibility. Waterstone Human Capital created the Most Admired Corporate Cultures program 11 years ago. The program was designed as a way to give recognition to Canadian companies that create a best-in-class work environment and promotes performance and helps to sustain a competitive edge.

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Under the leadership of President and CEO Ken Szekely, a trend-setting and award-winning entrepreneur, the Mercedes-Benz Burlington dealership ensures its employees work in an environment comparable to the quality of the vehicles showcased inside. Szekely purchased the dealership eight years ago as part of the Quantum Automotive Group. Szekely did not have a strong background in the world of retail, and so he treated his new business as he would any of his others; leading with the principle to create a strong sense of community and culture that is critical to a strong foundation for establishing and maintaining a forward-thinking business.



Just four years after Szekely took over the dealership, he was awarded the gold award in Retail Store Design by the International Design Council of Shopping Centers. Szekely took what was already a luxurious dealership and transformed it into a one-of-a-kind retail, lifestyle location that will now be remembered as one of the best dealership locations Mercedes-Benz has ever seen.

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By adding on-site features like the spa, the driving range and the movie theatre, the dealership experience is elevated beyond what anyone thought possible. While clients wait for services to be performed on their vehicles, they can enjoy a movie or hit a few balls at the driving range. It is no longer a transaction, but an adventure in luxury. This innovation that Szekely has brought to his Burlington retail experience has prompted many others to attempt to emulate the same.

During the transition into the dealership that exists today, Mercedes-Benz Burlington saw a major shift in the scale of operations and management-rebuilding program. A new, fresh team was developed with the same set of fundamental values that drive the force of Szekely's new corporate culture. One of these values is a mandate that all employees, regardless of their title within the company, do their utmost to contribute to the standard of excellence that Mercedes-Benz represents without compromise. Further to this, Szekely ensures that all successes and achievements of his employees are shared and celebrated. His goal is to promote a strong team mentality and ensure that everyone feels valued for what they bring to the table. Szekely recognizes that "employees are our single most valuable asset. They are the ones who will contribute to our long-term success."

Every employee is responsible for the success of the dealership overall, and Szekely believes in supporting and promoting staff from within. There are a number of employees within the company that started in entry-level positions and have taken on management roles and play a significant role in guiding the direction of the dealership. This stems strongly from the fact that a great deal of the employees under the Mercedes-Benz Burlington roof are young millennials. Providing growth opportunities and advancements resonates highly with this age group and helps to encourage leadership, passion and initiative. Szekely and the management team at Mercedes-Benz, Burlington encourage employees to share their thoughts and ideas and branch out into a new direction in their roles. Collaboration is a strong value within the company; a collective wisdom made up of many minds is what creates an environment centred on both loyalty and success.

"We make a point of letting individuals get involved in growing the business so they can really feel part of our success story. Our people are on the floor, where the action is happening. They notice issues and can make suggestions that help us improve our service standards," Szekely elaborates.

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Ongoing communication is also a key ingredient in the recipe for Szekely's success. Daily correspondence between employees is highly encouraged. Everything from morning huddles to scheduled department meetings are crucial to keeping the wheels of operation spinning optimally. Szekely and his team do not believe in waiting for formal reviews to address pertinent issues or concerns, but rather addressing them head-on as soon as they are observed. Transparent feedback, both negative and positive, allows them to correct mistakes before they become damaging to the brand.

In fact, the dealership itself was designed to promote an open-door policy and environment of idea sharing and trust. The glass walls increase the idea of transparency that the corporation functions around.

"It is not acceptable to be mediocre. We're not limited by the status quo. Our vision is for something bigger."



"Those glass walls are a symbolic reference to our belief that we should all - regardless of our level within the organization – be accountable to each other, share ideas and engage with each other," explains Szekely.

All of these fundamental beliefs and ideologies are instilled in employees from the very beginning. All potential hires for the dealership are put through a series of character trait assessment programs, followed by multiple interviews with department leaders. The requirements for each position are described in extreme detail to ensure that the alignment with applicants is correct. And while the organization may not always be hiring, they are always open to meeting new individuals with the drive, skills and ethics that compliment their corporate culture.

While the current corporate climate at Mercedes-Benz Burlington has already garnered Szekely and his team outstanding recognition, they are consistently looking for ways to improve what they do.

"It is not acceptable to be mediocre. We're not limited by the status quo. Our vision is for something bigger than the market and to be leaders in our community; to be aspirational rather than just to be there. Everyone here from our spa and customer service staff to our mechanics and sales people are committed to that."

AD SPACE