

# What makes a great workplace?

by Heidi Riley

A Healthy Workplace - Small Business Week

During Small Business Week in October, four PEI employers spoke about what makes their workplaces a great place for their employees. "These employers all have a commitment to staff engagement, a need for fun, an emphasis on wellness, and a desire to give back to the community," says **Jeanette MacAulay**, Executive Director, **UPEI Centre for Life-Long Learning**, who moderated the discussion.

## Bobby Dunn, General Manager, Charlottetown Transit



The Trius Transit system is now four years old and has 20 Transit employees plus 50 motor coach drivers in its Transportation division.

"It's easy to find bus drivers, but finding and retaining mechanics and people who clean the busses is more difficult," says Bobby. "It's tough to maintain people for evenings, nights and week-end shift work."

"We have had great results from hiring immigrants and integrating them into the business. I have found immigrants to have patience and perseverance, and are very accommodating. These are great characteristics to have in employees. They come to work on time, don't complain, and are a very stable workforce."

"As employers, it's important to be patient, appreciate their potential, and help them find their strengths and what they can contribute to the company."

"We encourage our other staff to learn to communicate with them, be tolerant and patient, and work through misunderstandings."

"I also visit our immigrant employees at home to find out how they are doing and what their needs are, and to keep the lines of communication open."

For more information, visit [www.triustransit.ca](http://www.triustransit.ca)



## Susan Frizzell, HR Administrator, DeltaWare Systems



DeltaWare is an IT company that specializes in eHealth and e-Business solutions. The company started in 1992 with a single individual, and now has over 100 employees. They have hired 33 staff since January 2009.

This company has been chosen by Mediacorp as one of Canada's Top Employers for the third time since 2003. DeltaWare was chosen because it encourages continuing education through tuition subsidies, specialized training programs and mentoring; offers high technology careers at one of the country's most livable cities; provides new employees with three weeks paid vacation to start, and helps employees save for retirement with a matching pension plan.

Susan says other benefits include salaries benchmarked against industry leaders, an annual performance and salary review, cost-shared health benefits, and a corporate wellness plan.

"The key to a positive workplace is mutual respect between employers and employees," says Susan. "We focus on what will keep our employees happy, because an organization is only as good as its people. It's hard to replace a good employee, so we focus on retention first and recruitment second."

For more information, visit [www.deltaware.com](http://www.deltaware.com)



For more information about Canada's top 100 employers, visit [www.canadastop100.com/atlantic](http://www.canadastop100.com/atlantic)

## Melody Dover, Founder, Fresh Media



Fresh Media is an advertising agency focused on brand, print design, and web design. At present, there are nine staff. A new person is coming on board in November, and there are plans to grow by two or three more people in the coming year.

Fresh Media was recently nominated for the 2009 Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce President's Award for Workplace Excellence.

"I have had good and bad experiences as an employee, and I brought that knowledge to my workplace," says Melody. "I wanted to make my workplace a place where people feel valued and look forward to coming to work. I don't have the flashy packages to offer like bigger companies do, but I feel I have created the kind of company that I would want to work at."

"I look at my staff as family, and I try to maintain a light-hearted but hard-working team environment. We have an open-concept workplace and flexible hours which consider family needs. In addition to statutory holidays, we offer time off for other holidays and birthday off with pay. We also offer a cost-shared health plan. We try to have fun on the job with special projects that bring the group together. We have a dose of laughter at the office at least once a day."

"We offer small perks to show appreciation for their hard work. We have established an annual Fresh Media rally day where staff are made aware of the direction of the company and ask for their feedback. We feel that open communication with all of the team is a key part of our brand culture."

For more information, visit [www.freshmedia.ca](http://www.freshmedia.ca)



## Everett Roche, Partner, MRSB Consulting Services Inc.



This Charlottetown company with 45 staff offers accounting, tax, and consulting services and sales and acquisition services. Everett is also a shareholder in **SwiftRadius**, a Charlottetown-based IT company with 40 IT positions in office locations across the Maritimes.

In 2007, MRSB was ranked by Progress Magazine as being the 5<sup>th</sup> best place to work in Atlantic Canada. SwiftRadius was voted the number one place to work in Atlantic Canada in 2008 and awarded the number two spot in 2009. "We offer challenging and interesting work," says Everett. "We demand a lot from our people, and they work hard. When staff work extra hours to meet deadlines, they are provided flex days in exchange for their efforts. The job can be high stress with the pressure of deadlines, and we try to provide a good workplace with the right people."

"We show our appreciation by offering benefits such as good pay, RRSP plan, flex days, bonuses, professional development, and health and dental plans. Other benefits include a massage day, staff get-togethers, subsidized gym memberships, nutrition and work/life balance speakers. And we sponsor and participate in the PEI marathon."

"We also celebrate our accomplishments. The company has an annual retreat where we discuss company goals and the staff's personal and business goals, and ask for suggestions and feedback. The single most important ingredient for building a great work environment is to engage all staff in planning and to harness the power of the entire team. Both MRSB and SwiftRadius strongly believe in a 'people first' culture."

For more information, visit [www.mrsbconsulting.com](http://www.mrsbconsulting.com)

