



eastern Canada, but is now evolving to serve customers in Alberta and the eastern U.S.

To keep the revamped operation efficient, Tochan and Racine carefully track the productivity of their factory employees. “Everyone works in front of a computer screen that measures the time they spend on each production task,” says Tochan. Far from feeling spied on, employees embrace the monitoring system: “It tells them if they are doing a good job. We see problems right away so we can find solutions.”

In addition, managers and employees meet monthly during the winter (agriculture’s slow season) to discuss what’s working, what’s not and how to improve things. “It can be anything,” says Tochan. “Our employees were complaining that the software we used was too slow and too limited. So we did our research and replaced it.”

It’s all hitting the mark among farmers; CASA’s sales have increased 17% in each of the past three years. “We are reliable and fast,” says Tochan, “and the word about us is starting to spread.” —JULIE BARLOW

COPPERLEAF

Slow hiring and thorough onboarding keeps staff turnover ultra-low

“Hire slow, fire fast” is a favourite mantra among companies around the world. Copperleaf follows a different version: “Hire really, really, *really* slow.”

Case in point: the Vancouver company waited almost nine years before it found the perfect candidate to fill the role of product manager. It’s a complex job that requires experience in software engineering, customer relations and technological innovation, so it can’t be done by just anyone with an impressive resumé.

This unyielding patience applies to all job openings, and while CEO Judi Hess admits that particular role was extreme, she stands by the strategy. “I would rather do without a person than have the wrong person do the role,” she says. “To win in the marketplace, you need a disproportionate share of the very best people compared to your competitors.”

The marketplace Hess is referring to is one that’s increasingly powered by knowledge. As a decision analytics software provider, Copperleaf helps utility companies make risk-informed decisions on their aging infra-

structure. For example, if a power company wants to add a substation to its grid, the software tells them how much to invest and what return to expect on the investment.

Given the nature of the work, nothing is more crucial than the continuity of service. Copperleaf can offer that, thanks to an exceptionally low voluntary employee turnover rate of two per cent per year.

What brings on this staff loyalty? The meticulous hiring process ensures folks are good fits from the outset. Once they join, they experience an onboarding process that allows them to become truly embedded in the ins and outs of the company. Every new hire spends 20 days over six to eight weeks learning what everyone in the executive management team does, what products the company sells and what customers (including Enbridge, BC Hydro and the U.K.’s National Grid) expect. Even receptionists get the lowdown on everything from product development to marketing strategies—even though it doesn’t directly pertain to their job. “One person said to me, ‘Wow, I’ve been in a lot of companies, but no one

trains me on what the products are or who the customers are,’ ” Hess recounts.

The onboarding process isn’t just for newbies. Every two years, existing employees will attend a three-hour session, led by Hess, on company culture. It is meant to realign veterans to Copperleaf’s core values and facilitate interaction with new hires in a fun setting. “I always joke that they’re here because they need remedial training,” says Hess. “But really, it’s helpful to have existing employees share real-life examples of how our culture works.”

This slow-and-steady approach to preparing recruits was a lot easier before Copperleaf hired 80 new people last year, bringing their total employee count to 210. With a recent expansion into Asia-Pacific and Japan, it’s been tempting to truncate training into a couple of days before scurrying new hires off to their desks. But Hess is not giving in to shortcuts, especially when it comes to people. “As you grow, it gets harder and more complex to do it all,” she says. “But our people power the company, and doing this makes a really big difference.” —MAI NGUYEN