

“ THIS IS A BUSINESS THAT IS ALL ABOUT BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES. THE WAY WE DELIVER OUR SERVICES MAY HAVE CHANGED ENORMOUSLY, BUT THE HOW — THAT IS, BUILDING THOSE RELATIONSHIPS — HASN'T. THAT'S PART OF THE SECRET SAUCE OF THIS FIRM. WE ARE VERY CLEAR ON WHAT WE DO AND EVEN MORE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT WE DON'T. — DEBRA HEWSON, ODLUM BROWN PRESIDENT/CEO



Odlum Brown Limited team members shoot a video for the Canada's Most Admired Gala. The cornerstone of Odlum Brown's corporate culture is working together to achieve what is in the best interests of the firm's clients. ODLUM BROWN PHOTOGRAPH

A FAMILY-LIKE CULTURE

Odlum Brown finds success in its team's shared values

ODLUM BROWN LIMITED

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When Debra Hewson joined Odlum Brown Limited in 1991, she immediately noticed that two parts of the culture were very much engrained. “One was the focus on the client; that was the *raison d'être* of the firm. But also there was that feeling of family. This was a group of individuals who all shared the same values and genuinely cared about each other. That really resonated for me,” says the president and CEO.

An employee-owned company since it was established in 1923, Odlum Brown is an independent, full-service investment firm that boasts a longstanding corporate culture that is family-like and supportive of each other's success. Over the years, it has grown to 267 dedicated team members.

Odlum Brown's reputation for outstanding cultural leadership has been recognized on many fronts. Not only has it been named a 2017 winner in the Canada's Most Admired Corporate Cultures Mid-Market category, the firm's corporate culture recently scored a 9.3 out of 10 in Investment Executive's 2017 Brokerage Report Card, far exceeding the performance average of 8.1.

Its own employee engagement survey received high overall engagement scores. “Our survey partner expressed that our response rate of 92 per cent was unprecedented,” Hewson says. “This exemplifies the culture of an employee-owned firm like ours, where personal

success and that of the firm are interchangeable.”

Hewson maintains that the family-like culture has been an integral part of the company's growth in an industry where there is a real war for talent. “It's difficult to find really great people, especially as we are a relatively small firm. But here we are, growing again because we have been able to attract people by investing in them as individuals.”

About five years ago, the firm had reached a point where it needed to formalize its leadership development efforts, she admits. “It became clear that we needed to be more deliberate around our organizational development, so we hired a new vice-president with deep knowledge in her field. She helped us focus on the steps we would take to build a community of leaders. We have worked hard to build a path for people here.”

That community building starts with the recruitment and hiring processes where Odlum Brown proudly showcases its corporate culture as a key differentiator in attracting talent. At the front and centre of its careers page is a video entitled “Our Unique Corporate Culture” that tells the story of Peter Pacholko, who joined the firm as a messenger in 1985 and is now the COO and CFO. “That video communicates how we invest in our people to strengthen our firm now, and for the future,” Hewson says.

In 2017, Odlum Brown launched an online onboarding portal to help new team members understand the company's culture and values and what it means to embrace them. It also helps with orientation to their new work environment. “We recognize that onboarding

starts as soon as the employment contract is signed, and we want new employees to feel like a part of the firm even before their first day,” Hewson says.

But that is only the beginning of an employee's journey. Odlum Brown is also firmly committed to building leadership from within. To that end, it has introduced a number of professional development initiatives. One such program is the Leadership Contract, based on the book of the same name by Vince Molinaro, that encompasses four pillars of leadership accountability: leadership is a decision, leadership is an obligation, leadership is hard work and leadership is a community.

A formal 360 leadership assessment tool is used to provide insight to leaders about how their leadership

capabilities can be applied to future challenges, and to develop a road map for the person to leverage his/her strengths and pinpoint areas for development.

Other initiatives include the Emerging Leaders program, a series of workshops and “snack-sized” learning modules designed to prepare individuals to take on increasingly challenging and senior leadership roles within the firm.

Courageous Conversations is a feedback model that instills people with the courage to challenge directly and the compassion to care for the employee as an individual.

There's also Owning Your Development — Managing Your Career: On and Off the Job, a program that helps participants discover new ways of working, learning and achieving career growth.

Additionally, Odlum Brown has invested in continuing education for professional development and health and well-being, with programs such as peer-to-peer mentoring, eating for energy and project management.

An important component of the performance management program is a mid-cycle check-in that asks employees what keeps them at Odlum Brown and what they want more of. “This serves as a ‘pulse check’ to proactively identify any retention flags,” Hewson explains.

In 2016, the firm launched the Odlum Brown Spirit

Awards, in which peers can acknowledge the exemplary actions and behaviours of team members who enrich the firm's culture and values. Recipients receive a personalized thank-you card and a \$100 cash reward toward an item in the categories of education, environment, entertainment or exercise.

Regular employee appreciation events include the annual shareholders reception and mix-and-mingles to mark fiscal year-end. Managers also host themed breakfasts and luncheons and annual awards ceremonies. “Team-building events like the annual golf tournament strengthen our culture

and show our employees that they matter,” Hewson notes.

In addition to its leadership and professional development programs, Odlum Brown University provides sessions on industry and related topics that include external speakers and internal peer-to-peer sessions.

As part of its commitment to supporting a healthy workplace, Odlum Brown also offers access to an employee assistance program as well as health and well-being sessions with a certified nutritionist.

The success of these combined efforts is reflected in the firm's exceptionally low employee turnover, something that Hewson says contributes to the well-established camaraderie of all team members. Currently, 49 per cent of the workforce has been with the firm for 10 years or more, and 22 per cent for 20 years or more.

As a longstanding community member, Odlum Brown has an exemplary corporate social responsibility strategy. “Rather than advertising our business through traditional means, we use our marketing dollars to establish a presence in our community and make a difference,” Hewson says. Sponsorships support initiatives in a wide range of areas, such as health care, education, arts and culture, sports and active living, the environment, youth and community development. More than half of those sponsorships are employee-driven. Today, annual corporate and employee-driven donations and sponsorships exceed \$1 million.

Their efforts have often been recognized by the community. Team Odlum Brown's Vancouver office has received the CIBC Corporate Spirit Award for fundraising

eight times. It has also been nominated for the Giving Hearts Awards program in the outstanding corporation category in recognition of its employees' efforts on behalf of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. As another example, the firm's head office team for the Ovarian Cancer Canada Walk of Hope was the No. 1 fundraising team in British Columbia and second overall in Canada.

Odlum Brown has also been recognized for its environmental responsibility, receiving a Certificate of Green Leadership from its office supply partner, White Paper Office Solutions. Its ongoing GO GREEN workplace campaign has also led to many internal environmental initiatives, including moving traditionally paper-based practices online.

In looking back at her early years with the company, Hewson says, “It was so fortuitous for me to land in a place that so much embodies what I believe. It's certainly easier to continue to nurture a culture, not to change it. I'm fortunate that I get to do that in a place that's easy for me, because everyone believes it and walks the talk.”

She adds that although the industry has changed enormously in the face of technology and innovation, Odlum Brown's core values have not. “When you think of what we do here, this is a business that is all about building long-term relationships with our clients and colleagues. The way we deliver our services may have changed enormously, but the how — that is, building those relationships — hasn't. That's part of the secret sauce of this firm. We are very clear on what we do and even more clear about what we don't.”

“ WE HAVE WORKED HARD TO BUILD A PATH FOR PEOPLE HERE.