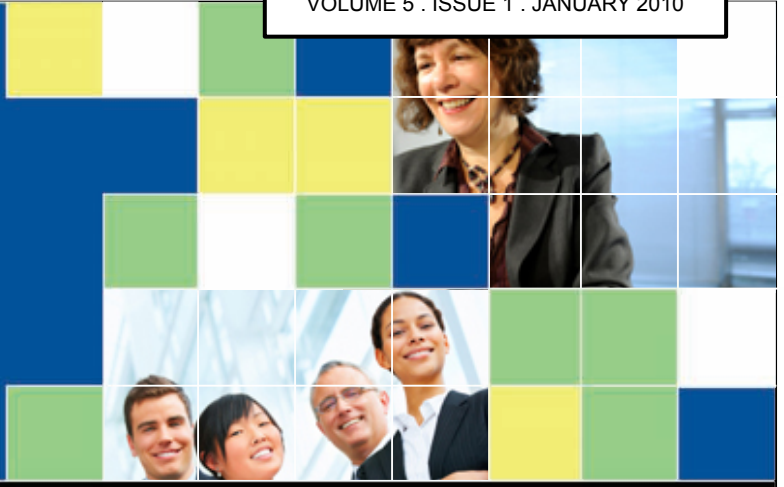


EMPLOYER Labour Market News

CALGARY AND AREA

Government
of Alberta ■



Keeping your workers engaged

MANY EMPLOYERS HAVE recognized the importance of employee engagement as being crucial to their employee's level of productivity, and in turn, necessary to ensure their company's survival.

An employee who is engaged in their job is going to be more committed, more efficient and perform better in their job duties than an employee who is not as interested in their job or their company.

But it can be challenging for employers to keep their workers engaged, especially now. The economic downturn has created a workforce full of people who may be worried about their job futures, and less focused, or engaged, in the tasks at hand.

According to the *Calgary & Area Labour Market Report – Third Quarter 2009*, voluntary employee turnover affected 64 per cent of Calgary companies. That is quite a change from the second quarter of 2009, when voluntary turnover was at 71 per cent—and even more so compared to the second quarter of 2008, when voluntary turnover affected a startling 99 per cent of Calgary companies.



Employees who are engaged in their work are more committed, more efficient and perform better in their job duties.

During that time, employees could leave one company without worry of finding work at another, so recruiting and retention were the focus of employers everywhere.

Engaging employees is certainly a part of retention, but at that point employee engagement was only a small speck in the overall large picture of how to keep staff from leaving. If they wanted to walk, they could do so easily.

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Now, the power card lies in the employer's hand. While that may seem like a good thing, it could signal one of two things: that employees are happy with their workplace and see no reason to leave, or it may mean employees aren't as engaged in their jobs as they once were, but don't want to leave for fear of being jobless.

In any case, it's time for employers to focus on gaining back that employee momentum and renewing the drive they had when they were hired.



TRUDY PELLETIER, HR COMPANY SIMPLY MORE

"It's human nature—people fall into habits and patterns," says Trudy Pelletier, executive coach and facilitator for consulting company Simply More.

"They run on automatic. The key to engagement is to lessen the grip that those habits and patterns have on us."

Lack of engagement is not always the employer's fault, but there are steps employers can take to recognize the problem and attempt to correct it, such as improving communication within the company and encouraging their employees.

Communication is key

"If you're looking for increased employee engagement, recognize it's a two-way dialogue," Pelletier says. "The employer has to be asking, listening and responding while the employee has to be

"If you're looking for increased employee engagement, recognize it's a two-way dialogue. The employer has to be asking, listening and responding while the employee has to be responsible for being part of the solution."

—Trudy Pelletier, HR Company Simply More



Communication and feedback are key components when it comes to keeping employees engaged.

responsible for being part of the solution."

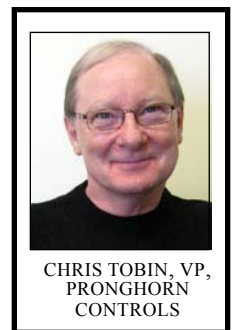
That means listening to employees' concerns, and also listening to the cues that signal they're not as engaged in their job as they should be, Pelletier explains.

"If an employee is not engaged, they're quite often cynical and have settled for the idea that nothing will ever be different. One of the first places it will show up is in their language—for example they'll say things like 'I'll try to,' or 'I'm hopeful,' instead of 'I will,' or 'I can.'"

Employees who are losing interest in their job may not put as much effort into their duties as they once did, resulting in simple mistakes or missed deadlines. They might even miss work, coming in late without being overly worried of the consequences. And when they are present, they may not actually be

"present," in the sense that they're disconnected from their coworkers and the work environment.

Chris Tobin, vice president of human resources for Pronghorn Controls, has worked with Pelletier on his company's human resources strategies. He strives to take an active part in engaging his employees, but with larger companies such as Pronghorn, it can be a challenge to get face time with everyone. Tobin manages six people directly, while the company itself has just over 200 employees.



CHRIS TOBIN, VP, PRONGHORN CONTROLS

Staying in contact

Tobin says the key is keeping in regular contact with other managers in the company and ensuring employees know they can talk to any one of them.

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“People want to be seen, they want to be heard, they want to be understood—these are fundamental human needs, so we encourage a lot of communication and understanding.”

—Chris Tobin, VP, Pronghorn Controls

Tobin also drives between branches quite often, so he’s not just hearing the issues secondhand.

“We welcome feedback. People can communicate their needs to us human resources folks or their supervisors anytime,” Tobin says.

“People want to be seen, they want to be heard, they want to be understood—these are fundamental human needs, so we encourage a lot of communication and understanding.”

Communication is a vital factor in employee engagement, and it’s something many employers don’t do enough of, or don’t do well.

Employees want to know what’s happening in their company. They want to know the processes the company is involved in and the steps it’s taking to reach its goals—not to mention what those goals are. What they don’t want is to be informed of the end results after the fact.

“Human connection is a lost art,” says Pelletier. Employers must recognize the need to connect with their employees and find ways to inform them of what’s going on.”

Monthly newsletters and a company intranet are great tools to keep employees up-to-date on what’s new. But perhaps just as important is inviting them to contribute to the company’s activities.

Soliciting feedback

Soliciting feedback is a great way to help employees feel more in tune with the company, and to get some

useful input. You can do this by letting employees know they’re welcome to voice their opinion on company issues, or by holding company-wide meetings where everyone gets a say.

Soliciting feedback is also helpful when trying to identify the barriers to employee engagement. Some employers do this through company surveys, which can be submitted anonymously so employees feel more comfortable opening up.

In some cases, a company’s human resources department can devise such surveys, while other companies choose to outsource to a human resources consultant.

Once you have the answers at your fingertips, examine them carefully for any common threads. If you notice any recurring answers, those may be the ones that you need to address first—and don’t just add it to your long list of to-dos, but look at a way you can tackle each issue step by step.

“A lot of employers recognize something must be done, but are slow to respond, often because it’s a relationship or communication issue that is blurred with

perceptions and emotions, making it challenging to tackle,” says Pelletier.

It’s one thing to identify the issues, but it’s another to develop an action plan—and yet another to transform the issue.

Taking action

Aside from communication, employees want results. So take action and show them how they’re making a difference in the company, whether it’s through sharing customer satisfaction reports or testimonials to the work they do.

“Most people don’t feel like what they do makes a difference,” says Pelletier. “Articulate their contribution and let them know that what they do matters.”

As simple as it sounds, a compliment goes a long way, too. Once out of school, people don’t get the A+ marks or regular feedback that lets them know they’re doing well—and not that you should start grading work assignments, but a figurative pat on the back can be all it takes to encourage someone.

Taking a closer look at your employees’ workload can also be beneficial.

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Ways to engage employees

Listen. People want their opinions to be valued and not feel like they’re talking to a wall.

Act. It’s one thing to listen, but it’s another to put words into action.

Communicate. Improving the lines of communication may help employees take a greater interest in their company, and in their job.

Involve. If employees have a common goal to work towards, they’ll care more about the end results.

Encourage. Let employees know when they’re doing a good job.

Examine. Look at your employees’ workloads to determine if any changes need to be made.

Educate. Learning new skills is beneficial to employees and to a company overall.

Motivate. Whether it’s offering flex time or holding company events, going that extra mile to motivate employees can offer great rewards.



Sometimes an overworked and over stressed employee can lose interest in their work altogether, and then nothing gets done.

Delegate as much as possible, and if hiring extra hands is not an option, give employees more of the work they take a special interest in. Employees are usually happier if they actually enjoy and take pride in their work.

Contrary to what some might think, money is not always the best way to encourage employee engagement, so if you don't have the budget for a company-wide raise you're not completely out of luck.

"Money is not a motivator, however it can be a de-motivator," says Pelletier.

"If you're being paid less than what is fair market value, then you will look for a job simply because of the inequity in compensation. But if you're being paid at fair market value, and your company has more of what people are looking for, things like a good company culture and a balanced approach to the issues, then often money is not the motivating factor."

So instead, choose to focus on creating a fulfilling work environment with motivators that go beyond financial rewards.

Offer training opportunities

Training opportunities can also renew employees' motivation, especially those who maybe aren't as engaged because they don't have the proper skills to do their best job in the workplace. Their training may just be outdated, or there might be one or two areas where they don't excel.

Yes, training programs can cost money, but if you're not equipped to send your employees off for training, you may be able to cover some of it in-house.

The wonderful thing about having different personalities and skill sets within a company is that people can learn from each other.

Employees can take turns hosting informal training seminars, or you can inquire about the cost of bringing training professionals in to train a large group of people at once.

Tobin, a former school principal who has also worked at SAIT, places a high value on education. He says his company Pronghorn has a wide range of training programs available to its employees, who are considered the company's best investment.

"We want them to know they work in partnership with us," he says. "By offering training, we're helping them build a future with us."

Other motivators, like flex time and company team-building events, can also help employees feel more connected to their company.

"There's no black-and-white answer," says Pelletier. "People want the softer, grayer, emotionally fulfilling things, which of course is not always easy to accomplish."

Lead by example

Consider the things your employees have requested in their feedback, but also take a look at yourself and what engages you, says Pelletier.

Employees look to their employers for leadership—if they see you're engaged and motivated, it's more likely to make the difference you are looking for.

"People want to be inspired," Pelletier says.

"Are the leaders themselves excited about where the organization is going? More often than not, leaders need to make a personal change in order for the business to change."



Signs an employee is losing interest

There are some telltale signs an employee is not as engaged in their job as they may once have been. Keep a watch out for the following behaviours:

- **Negative language**

Instead of being enthusiastic about work projects, a disengaged employee will use words like "I'll try" or "I'm hopeful."

- **Running on autopilot**

Employees who are losing interest might not take as much care with their job duties as they should. Simple mistakes and never going above-and-beyond their regular work duties could signal that they're bored. It could also signal that they're overloaded with work, which can also lead to disengagement.

- **Frequent tardiness**

If an employee is often late for work, it could be they just don't want to be there and don't care about the reputation they're creating for themselves.

- **A lack of involvement in the company culture**

Employees who often keep to themselves could feel disconnected or unaccepted by the company and their coworkers.

Investing in the workforce

Upside Software Inc. makes its employees a priority

ASHIF MAWJI, PRESIDENT and CEO of Upside Software Inc., attributes his company's success to his loyal employees—a talented group of people, he says, that he doesn't take for granted.

"Our business depends on the products we build, and those products are built by our staff," Mawji says. "We wouldn't be anywhere without them."

Mawji has put great effort into creating the kind of work environment his employees enjoy, and to let them know they're appreciated. With less than a one per cent turnover rate at his company and a host of awards, including a 2010 Alberta's Top 50 Employer award and a 2010 Canada's Top 100 Employer award, he must be doing something right.

Upside Software Inc. has staff in Calgary, Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, with its head office located in Edmonton. In total, there are about 160 employees working for the company. From their first day on the job, Mawji ensures they're received with welcoming arms.

"Everyone is assigned a 'buddy' when they start," he says. "The HR manager really tries to help people as well, with everything from work issues to personal health issues."

Managers at the company are provided with funding for team-building events, whether it's for a company luncheon or other special occasion. They also hold frequent 'town hall' sessions, where management gives an overview of the issues and challenges the company is up against and solicits feedback from employees.

"Employees are always in the loop," Mawji says.

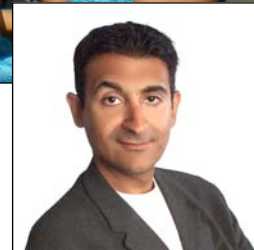
They're included in other ways, too, such as through profit sharing. "We want them to understand how much of a contribution they're making," he adds.

While a team atmosphere is very important to the company, individual endeavors are also supported. Employees are given paid time off to help out a charity of their choice, and employees' charitable contributions to United Way are matched 100 per cent by the company.

"We promote a sense of sharing and giving back to the community," Mawji says.



Ashif Mawji, president and CEO of Upside Software Inc. (right), attributes his company's success to his loyal employees, pictured above.



Employees are encouraged to further their education and upgrade their skills, and can do so with funding from the company.

And a little something for the company's hockey fans—Upside Software Inc. has a box at the Rexall Place, which employees get to share.

With a mix of tangible and non-tangible perks, Mawji has developed a workforce that is engaged and vested in the company's future. From time to time, however, a manager will spot an employee that may not be "100 per cent brought in," Mawji says.

The company is more than willing to work with an employee to better their performance and level of engagement, while using tools such as surveys to find out what the company can do to improve. "We do interdepartmental surveys," Mawji says. "They're done anonymously through third party software."

This guards the privacy of employees, who are allowed the freedom to open up and contribute suggestions without worrying about being identified through their survey.

Mawji is of the belief that how you treat people will affect how they treat you, and in his case, his company.

"We put our employees' needs at the forefront and everything else falls into place."



Making sense of oil and gas prices

And how they affect your company

IT'S EASY TO understand why many Calgarians have little or no understanding of how the oil and gas industry actually works. Tracking gas prices can feel like a roller coaster ride, with prices down one day and up the next. Besides, how could your company possibly suffer from the tumultuous trading of commodities 700 km north of you?

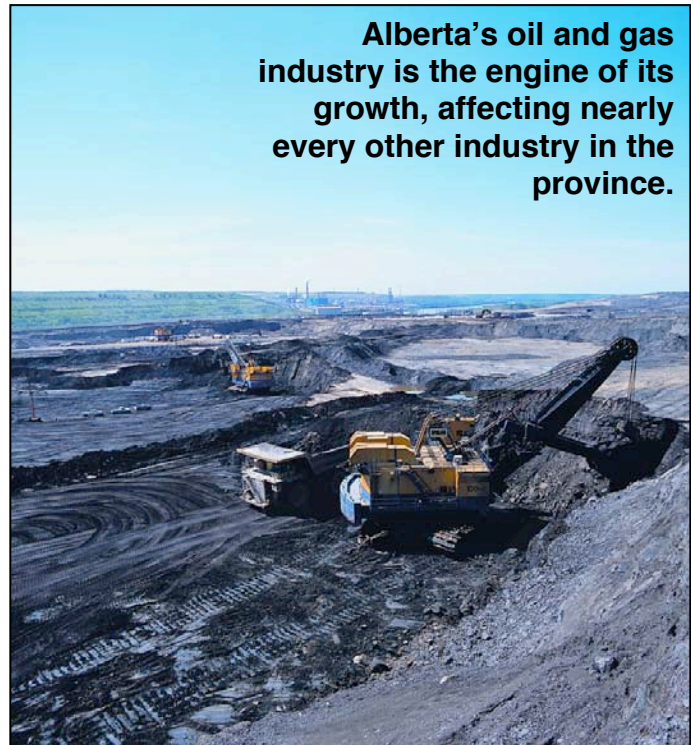
But it does affect you. Why? Because it affects almost every industry in Alberta.

The oil and gas industry has been the province's engine of growth since 2000, bringing billions of dollars into our province through investments and government revenues and contributing over 30 per cent to Alberta's GDP in 2008, far more than any other industry (see chart below).

The industry directly employed over 145,000 people in 2008, almost 10 per cent of the total population.

But that's just a small part of the population that's employed thanks to the oil and gas industry. Its activity impacts almost every other sector of our economy, from the construction industry that builds the oil and gas plants and facilities to automotive sales, accommodations and retail sales.

The global economic downturn that crippled commodity prices in 2008 has caused a major slowdown in the oil and gas sector, with some companies implementing hiring freezes and others doing massive layoffs.



And naturally, that slowdown has affected almost all other sectors as well.

"The economic downturn that hit us in 2008 has affected everything in our province," says Roger Soucy, president of the Petroleum Services Association of Canada. "You name it—hotels, restaurants, banks—every aspect of the Alberta economy has been affected because there's less money around, so less is being spent. A huge proportion of money is both generated and spent through the oil and gas industry and that affects all kinds of businesses."

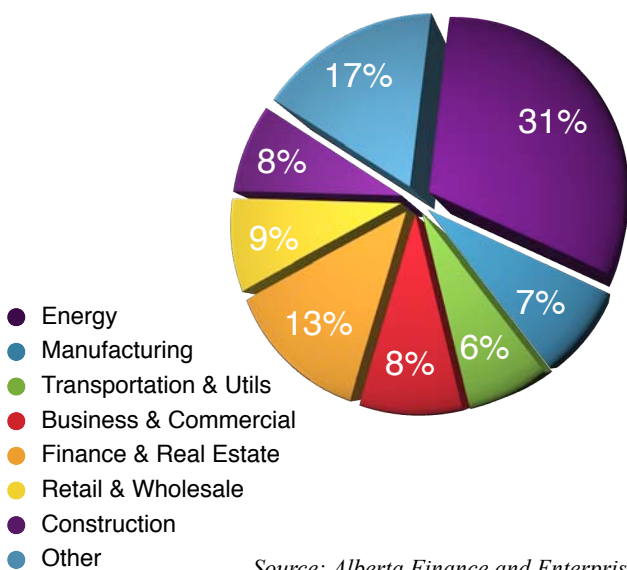
That's why it's important for all employers to keep an eye on oil and gas prices. These prices determine where our economy is, and that will affect most businesses now and in the future.

So why do oil and gas prices change so much?

In theory, supply and demand should dictate the price for commodities such as oil and gas, and to a large extent they do. But there are other factors affecting their prices which you don't see on a day to day basis. On the following page we will discuss both oil and gas—what they are, how prices work, what's been happening with them and what is forecast for the future.

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Alberta GDP by industry, 2008





What is oil?

Extracted from the Western Canadian Sedimentary Basin, crude oil is an international commodity and is traded globally, usually in \$US per barrel.

How does pricing work?

Because oil is internationally traded, its prices are subjected to more factors than simple supply and demand.

“The stringent laws of supply and demand are not the only factors at play when it comes to oil and gas prices,” says Soucy. “Speculation on things such as geopolitical issues affecting production are large factors. When it comes to oil, 75 per cent of its price is based on supply and demand while the rest is speculation.”

What’s been happening with oil?

When the economic downturn first hit the oil industry in 2008, investments were drastically reduced, and as a result many projects were stalled and layoffs occurred. But since spring of this year the price of oil has been rising steadily, rebounding 77 per cent this year and staying fairly steady at above \$70 per barrel.

What’s in the forecast?

Oil prices have been steadily increasing this year and this is expected to continue throughout 2010. “Oil prices are holding up reasonably well and I’m going on the assumption that oil will hold in the \$70 range in 2010 and that price will be enough incentive to continue drilling,” says Soucy.

What is natural gas?

Collected from various pockets throughout the province, this commodity is usually measured in cubic feet.

Although crude oil gets much of the attention in Alberta, natural gas is actually the largest single source of resource revenue for the Government of Alberta, accounting for more than \$42 billion in royalties paid to the provincial government between 2000 and 2007.

Natural gas is collected during the summer months and stored for the upcoming winter months when usage is highest. It is only traded in Canada and the U.S. and over half of our natural gas is sent to the United States.

What’s been happening with natural gas?

New technologies in the U.S. that offer the possibility for the country to drill their own reserves of what is called shale gas, have created speculation

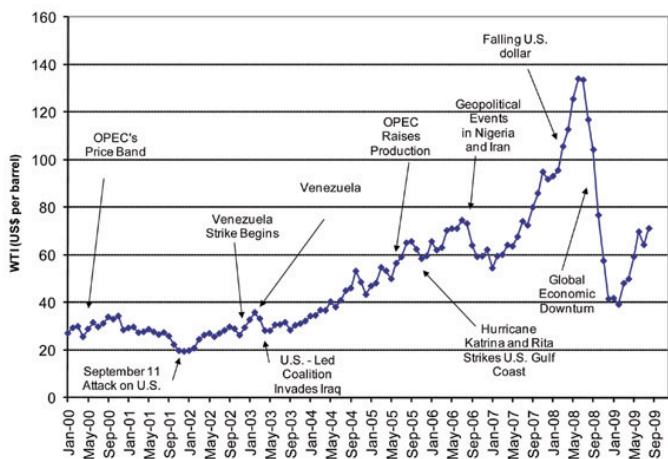
in the market that this gas will to a large extent replace the natural gas Alberta currently ships there. Because of this, prices for natural gas have dropped sharply in recent months.

“Last summer, for example, we were in the range of \$13 to \$14 for natural gas, and this time last year we were at \$7,” says Soucy. In mid-November of 2009, the price of natural gas was hovering at around just \$3.

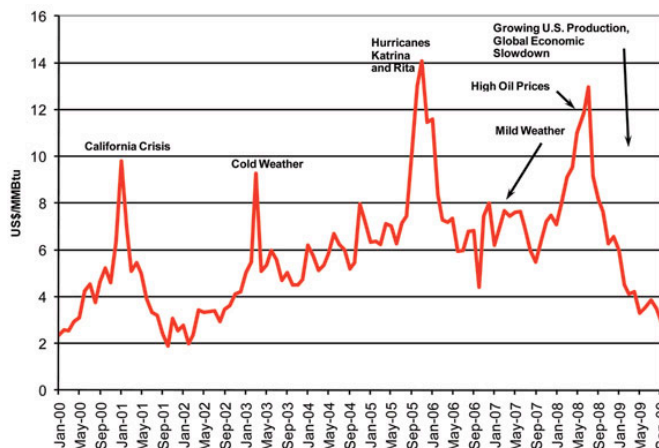
What’s in the forecast?

Predictions for natural gas prices vary. While some economists forecast the U.S. will start drilling shale gas extensively, thereby causing an even further drop in prices, others say shale supplies alone won’t meet American demands and the price of natural gas will rise.

“I’m forecasting that we will have the same amount of gas wells in 2010 as in 2009 in Western Canada anyways, with a slight drop in Alberta,” says Soucy.



Source: National Energy Board



Source: National Energy Board

Where to find prices

The prices of oil and natural gas are reported every day on local and national television as well as in local newspapers. But if you want to track it online, the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX.com) provides continuous and reliable updates daily.

BIG IDEAS from small business



CUSP Dental Care

FOR LEONA LELIEVRE, working with teeth was a natural fit.

“I remember being interested in becoming a dental hygienist since I was a kid,” LeLievre says. “I remember I was 14 and there was this program where dental therapists would come to schools in remote areas to check on the kids’ teeth, and I was in one of those schools they visited and I just thought their job was so cool.”

And sure enough, right after graduating from high school LeLievre enrolled in dental therapy and then moved on to the dental hygiene program before continuing her career as a dental hygienist, eventually moving to Airdrie.

So when the regulations changed enabling dental hygienists to open their own independent practices in 2007, LeLievre decided to jump on board.

“I was working in dental offices for quite some time but I found patients were just coming and going and I never got to have a relationship with them, which I really didn’t like,” LeLievre says. “I love visiting with patients and thought I could do that if I opened my own business.”

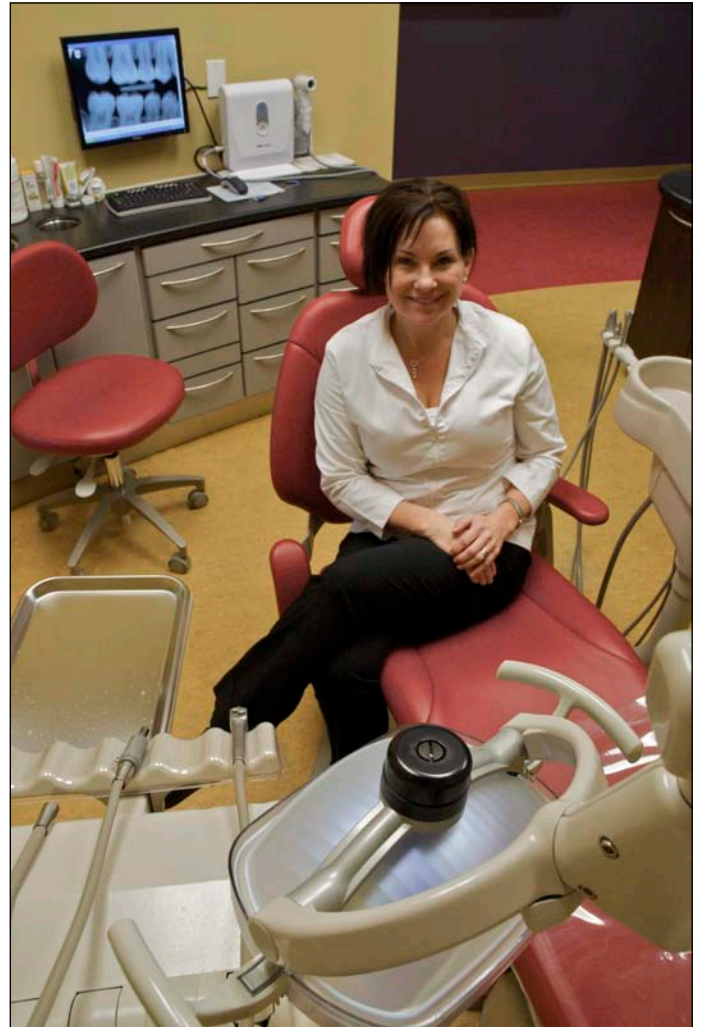
Although LeLievre had a great deal of knowledge about dental hygiene, she had only a limited amount of knowledge when it came to running a business.

“When you’re in the profession for as long as I was, you learn a lot of administrative things as you go, but it was still a huge learning curve for me,” she says.

In order to upgrade her business skills, LeLievre decided to take the Community Futures West self-employment program last October.

“I would be in there once or twice a week, depending on what they were teaching,” she says. “I learned so much, like marketing, advertising, how to do your research in terms of things like banking, payroll, federal taxes—all the things you don’t learn as a dental hygienist.”

Armed with information, LeLievre began the next task of finding office space and eventually decided to open her space in a new development in Airdrie.



Leona LeLievre met with many obstacles while opening her business earlier this year.

“I have seen this place throughout the whole time it was being built,” says LeLievre. “I designed it and decorated it, and I love it.”

But there was one challenge LeLievre couldn’t possibly be prepared for—the economic crisis.

In early 2009, while in the midst of building and designing her office space, LeLievre found she suddenly couldn’t get the financing required to purchase her equipment.

“It’s almost as if overnight there was this drastic change and banks just stopped lending,” she says.

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“Don’t dwell on the fact that the economy is suffering. You just need to find a niche—there’s always something you can do to get people in your door.”



“It took me three months; I had to just keep reapplying for the financing and finally I got it.”

Relieved and ready to take on the next obstacle, LeLievre began advertising her company and booking appointments a couple months before the business opened.

“I did a lot of different kinds of advertising,” she says. “I advertised in the local papers, on the radio and even put up some billboards.”

LeLievre also realized the importance of networking. “I am a member of the chamber of commerce which is a very tight networking group here in Airdrie. I also try to get my services out there to the public as much as possible by doing things like giveaways for company events” she says.

Once her office was built and ready to go, LeLievre opened her new business, CUSP Dental Care, in May 2009 with only herself and one other hygienist.

With walk-in clients and the customers she attracted through advertising and networking, LeLievre started with a small client base.

“I started out with just a few clients here and there but word of mouth has really spread and it’s been good for me,” she says.

LeLievre has found despite the economic downturn people are still coming into her clinic to get their teeth maintained.

“It’s actually a pretty good system because the clients know we’re not here to sell them on expensive services,”

she says. “If they want a cleaning they can get just a cleaning, there’s no pressure. If we find something they can ask what they need to get done and if it’s urgent or if it can wait. It builds a good relationship, which is a huge aspect of the job for me.”

In October 2009, the business went through a low point. “That was a tough month for me, mostly because the kids were going back to school which is always a slow time,” says LeLievre, who decided to think of ways to make her business more attractive. “I thought, ‘What can I do to get people in the door?’ and although I already give away a whitening treatment, I decided to give away electronic toothbrushes to clients too,” she says.

And it worked. Since opening in May last year, LeLievre’s client base has grown to between 350 to 400 clients. In order to meet demand LeLievre now has five employees, including two receptionists and three hygienists.

“Things are already starting to improve,” says LeLievre. “Of course there are going to be days that are challenging and days that are better but that’s the nature of a start up business. You don’t just open your door and you’re laughing. It just doesn’t work that way.”

And for someone who started her business in the midst of the economic recession, LeLievre has some words of advice for other worried business owners out there.

“Don’t dwell on the fact that the economy is suffering. You just need to find a niche—there’s always something you can do to get people in your door.”



Need to learn more? Take online courses about employment standards!

Learning more about employment standards can be as easy as a click of the mouse!

The Alberta government's Employment and Immigration department offers [eLearning programs](http://employment.alberta.ca/SFW/268.html). (employment.alberta.ca/SFW/268.html).

These stand-alone, interactive, web-based awareness programs are designed to provide Alberta employers and employees with an opportunity to learn more about minimum employment standards in the workplace.

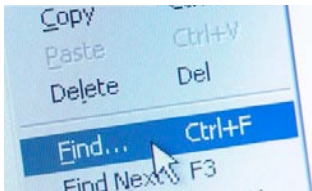
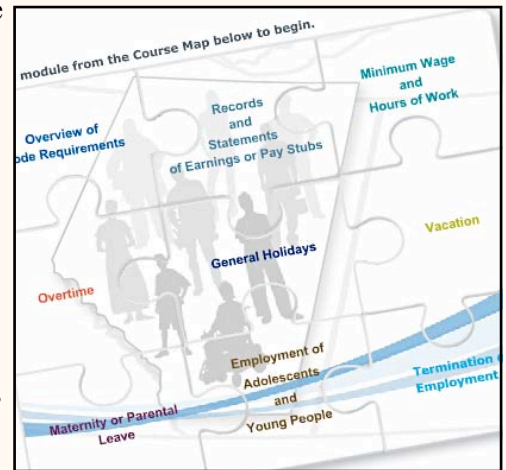
The following online courses are now available:

Dispute Resolution

Provides basic information and options to help address disputes in the workplace relating to payment of earnings, leaves, etc.

Basics of Employment Standards

This eLearning program will help you gain a basic understanding of the main topics of Employment Standards legislation.



Whether it is for workplace support or general knowledge, there are many places employers can turn for information.

Health and Safety

Work Safe Alberta

An organization committed to preventing work-related injuries.

employment.alberta.ca/whs-wsa

Canadian Safety Council—Occupational Safety and Health

Provides information on how to encourage safety in the workplace and deal with mishaps.

safety-council.org

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)

Gives direction to employers regarding what to do if employees suffer from substance abuse problems.

ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/substance.html

General Links

Calgary Chamber of Commerce

An organization for business in Calgary to network and learn business practices. calgarychamber.com

Where to find us

This publication and other labour market information products can be found at

employment.alberta.ca/calgary.

We welcome your feedback! Send comments or suggestions to ei.webmaster@gov.ab.ca.

Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce

Alberta government's 10-year labour force strategy. employment.alberta.ca/betw

Calgary Economic Development

Connects businesses to information and networks in the Calgary region and promotes the city.

calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com

Economic development in Alberta

Provides support and assistance to Alberta business and also compiles information on the Alberta economy.

albertacanada.com

Employee Relations

Alberta Employment and Immigration Mediation Services

Helps resolve disputes in the workplace through collective bargaining agreements.

employment.alberta.ca/mediationservices

Human Resources

Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA)

The human resources body combining efforts of 10 provincial and specialist human resources associations.

cchra-ccarh.ca

Alberta Employment Standards

Information on everything from minimum wage to maternity and parental leave.

employment.alberta.ca/employmentstandards

Alberta Labour Relations Board

Employment standards information for trade unions, labour law and more.

alrb.gov.ab.ca/index.html