

HOW TO GET FOLLOWERS & INFLUENCE PEOPLE

# ALBERTA + *Biotech Blues: Searching for Capital* VENTURE

**THE  
SMALL  
BUSINESS  
ISSUE**



## BEE SMALL

Alberta's beekeepers contend with pests, pesticides and even petty thieves – and still turn a profit

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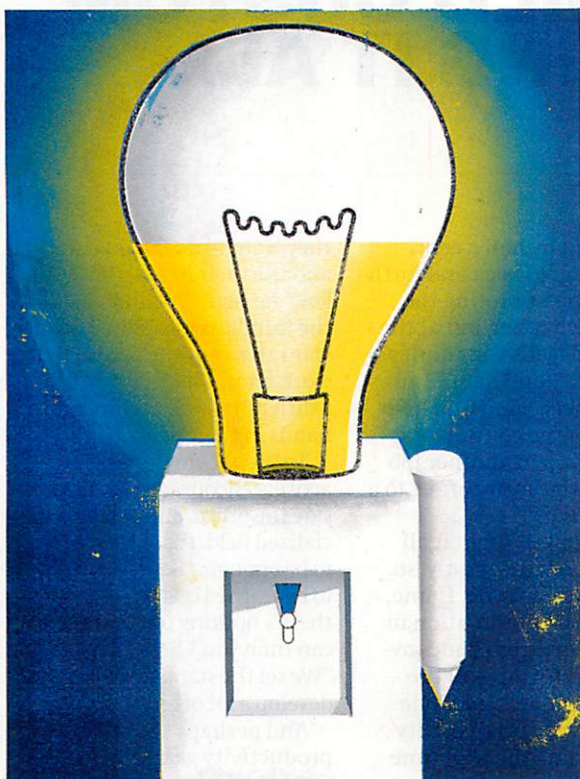
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# SEEKING INNOVATION IN PEOPLE, PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS

## WESTERN MANUFACTURING, GRANDE PRAIRIE

**TO WESTERN MANUFACTURING, A STEEL** tank and oilfield equipment manufacturer, innovation is more than a buzzword. It's a core value. Joseph Barak, the vice-chairman of the company, says that's something its leadership thinks about every day. "We really focus intensely on driving our company forward through innovation at all levels of the team, and we ruthlessly try to remove all obstacles to allow all of our employees to innovate," he says. While most people think of innovation in terms of technological gadgets – something Western values too – the company focuses not only on high-tech innovation but also on practising innovative leadership, employee retention and culture.

Attracting and retaining smart, capable employees is an essential part of building an innovative team, Barak says, and Western Manufacturing has done that in part by introducing a profit-sharing plan. Barak says the key is that every employee is able to participate in those rewards. "Everybody is motivated to work as a team to come up with innovative ideas, whether it's a product or a process, to make the company successful," he says. Providing employees with training opportunities and career development also

inspires them to stay with the company.

Another part of the equation is Western's corporate culture. Barak says safety is key, but not the kind that requires hard hats and work gloves. "We make people safe," he says. "People feel safe talking about their ideas; they're not worried about getting shot down." By valuing all ideas put forward, even those that may not be realistic, Western Manufacturing reduces the possibility that an employee with a good idea will stay silent out of fear that it will be ridiculed or dismissed. The company also has a "fail fast" approach to innovation, which means it's willing to move on to the next idea as quickly as possible when an idea doesn't work out.

That strategy has paid off for the company, which has successfully developed several new products thanks to its dedication to innovation. Barak is particularly proud of the Whale Tank, a unique mobile tank that's highly customizable and replaces the need for multiple trucks of equipment. "Are we perfect on everything? No, we're not. But innovation is what we talk about all the time, it's what we think about, and we're actually putting products out into the market successfully as a result of this," Barak says.

## PARTING ADVICE

- 1] Begin with benefits**  
Attracting and retaining creative employees is essential to innovating, so consider what kind of benefits you can provide to bring those individuals to your company.
- 2] Bring an open mind**  
Fully consider all ideas that are brought up, rather than shooting down ones that initially seem untenable – sometimes an unrealistic solution will inspire one that's perfect.
- 3] Fish or cut bait**  
Be willing to abandon projects that don't work out.
- 3] The all-around approach**  
Yes, technology is important, but a company that innovates only in one area is less likely to succeed at creative, innovative and effective products.

Canada's highest average household incomes: 1. Fort McMurray \$177,510; 2. Calgary \$98,300; 3. Edmonton \$96,030