



# DURHAM

Trade and Commerce



## Thought Leaders: Buffett Taylor & Associates Ltd.

By Sherry Hinman

You've heard it before: epiphany. That ground-shaking moment when everything changes, especially your perspective. It happened to Ed Buffett in 1994: a heart attack nearly took his life. Ed Buffett (holding the plaque above) has been president and CEO of Buffett Taylor and Associates Ltd since 1981, when their focus was on benefits consulting and administrative services. After that life-changing event, nothing would be the same. And he's grateful for that.



"I was working 75 hours a week, I was a three-pack-a-day smoker, no exercise and lots of stress," he says. "Did you know that 38 per cent of heart attack sufferers don't survive?" he asks. It's a sobering statistic and the fact that he beat it was not lost on him.

"It didn't just make me rethink my lifestyle," says Buffett. "It made me rethink the way I ran my business. After the heart attack, I stepped back and let others run it, but that wasn't right." He felt it was important to engage the employees in the process, but he still needed to have an important role and not step too far back.

And so began a process of change in the way everyone at Buffett Taylor did business, in a constant search for balance. At the core of his philosophy is that the workplace should be fun. "What gets successful leaders out of bed in the morning," he says, "is a love of work; it should be just as much fun as work."

And fun it is. The list of Buffett Taylor's programs to promote health, foster wellness and create a strong sense of team seems endless: "We have a ping pong table downstairs," says Buffett. "We have bowling nights, a corporate golf tournament, a cruise on the lake, a night at the racetrack. It's about sharing and caring about one another," he says."

"We just had a fitness challenge," says Keith Ryan, account executive at Buffett Taylor. "We have a walking group. From June until the end of September, we walk at noon hour."

Doesn't all that time with colleagues take away from family time, you might wonder? Family is a critical part of Buffett Taylor's philosophy. Family is always included. All their health screening programs, such as flu shots, blood pressure checks, back care programs and much more, are available for staff and family members as well.

Wellness is a tricky term to define. "Wellness on a personal level," Buffett says, "is the pursuit, because we're always chasing it, of the optimum balance in work, family and personal living."



Wellness is not only what Buffett Taylor espouses and practices, it's also what they sell. With clients like Inco, Region of Durham, Shoppers Drug Mart and Xerox, they are seeing wellness programs become more firmly established in the workplace.

As for new clients, "we make the business case for wellness," Buffett says. "We tell them to look at their employee costs rising, health care costs, absenteeism, all rising. We just ask them 'What's been happening with your benefit rates and absenteeism?'. Wellness is good for the bottom line."

"We have thirty people here," Buffett says. "Thirty good people. We have programs that promote health, for example our vending machine that has only healthy food in it. We have on-site massage every other Tuesday, subsidized gym memberships and paid tuition fees for courses related to work. Flexible work hours, extra paid holidays. We have a quiet room for when you just need to be by yourself."

"And you get your birthday off," he says with a smile. "I always said that, if I ever owned my own business, I'd give everyone the day off on their birthday." Sounds delightful, but Buffett takes this kind of benefit seriously. "If you treat people the way you'd like to be treated, you'll get more than that back," he says.

So how does a wellness environment impact on the staff at Buffett Taylor? "Our absenteeism is less than one day per year," Buffett says. "We work hard, but we also have a lot of fun. This is a fabulous group. They have different skill sets, but they're competitive, people-oriented and they have a good sense of humour."

Work environment doesn't get better than this. But you don't have to take Buffett's word for it. Last June, the National Quality Institute awarded Buffett Taylor with a Canada Awards for Excellence Healthy Workplace Gold Trophy - Small Organizations, for 2005-2007. Buffett Taylor is the first recipient of this award.

"We applied for it because it would give us a good indication of where we were, and because it was a huge team-building exercise," Buffett says. "Keith headed up the committee and they took nine months to prepare." Ryan says, "We learned a lot of things along the way; it was a great tool to evaluate ourselves and a real team effort."

"We got the call at the end of June [2005]," says Buffett. "We were all excited. They said it was the highest quality they've ever seen. We went for a fabulous dinner at the Convention Centre; we took all of Buffett Taylor."

Not one to rest on his laurels, or to rest at all, Buffett already has the company's collective eye on the next award. "You can reapply after three years and get the Canada Excellence Award for Lifetime," he says.

Buffett's vision of his company in 10 years includes staying in Whitby. "But we'll outgrow this space," he says. "In 10 years, we'll probably have 10 times the wellness clients. It is the future," he says. "We were the first; we were the thought leaders."

And the fun? "We're going to continue to have fun. I'm 63. I hope I'll be here," he adds with a laugh.

Buffett Taylor is the proud recipient of the Canada Award for Excellence (CAE)  
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