



CANADIAN  
TEXTILE INDUSTRY  
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training management  
leadership  
Industry textile  
strategy Success  
machinery research  
Story COMPETITION  
commitment innovation  
QUALITY customers  
labour



**The Calko Group was founded in the heart of Montreal's historic garment district in 1954. At that time, most of the manufacturers, suppliers, customers and competitors in the textile industry were in the garment district, and it worked well. Everything that they needed was right on hand, and it was a good place to foster a young business. The company operated here successfully for around 13 years, but this was just the beginning. Their success story, like so many in the textile industry, started here in Montreal.**

Around 1967 they made the first big and bold move of relocating the manufacturing to Rivière-du-Loup. The move was a daring one on the part of the management team of the time and took them away from their roots and the roots of the textile industry in Montreal. With no experienced labour on hand, apprenticeship programs replaced the competition for skilled labour, reducing costs and freeing up money for further expansion. The company now operates in Canada, the USA, and the Dominican Republic, comprising more than 250,000 square feet of manufacturing space, and over 500 machines with unique and special functions. I think I even saw in the photos a few Tompkins's knitting machines that I would feel fairly comfortable working on.



When I asked them how they define success, I was told that they define it by how well they adhere to their corporate motto and strategy of **"Innovation, Quality, and Commitment"**. Their corporate strategy is more than just a plaque on the wall— it is taken seriously by the company and made clear to their employees. With clear expectations, regular meetings with customers and staff sharing ideas and frustrations, fostering leadership in the next generation, and leading through example, they work hard to keep innovation, quality, and commitment at the forefront of their operation.

As time passes, the meaning of success has also changed or broadened. In days past, more attention was focused on the bottom line, but, for the long term, focusing only on the bottom line does not always work that well. Calko Group has learned that continuous research and development on new products, investing in the future with new machinery, working with their employees to keep them engaged, providing training and opportunities for growth for employees, and being able to make quick changes when they are needed, all of these are essential to building a successful company, and, in the end, to keep on achieving the original goal of a financially successful company.

With an eye on their future success, they work hard to keep their employees engaged. Calko Group has an inverted pyramid organisational structure, giving employees more freedom to make decisions, take ownership, and be involved in how their work is performed. This provides employees with more satisfaction in the work that they do, and allows managers and supervisors to work along with the employees, rather than lording over them. With more ownership of their own work, employees tend to have more pride in the work that they do, and quality targets and corporate goals are easier to achieve.



With cross-training and training programs, employees can be assured of not growing bored by performing only one repetitive task and can be moved to other areas as needs dictate. Opportunities for promotion within the company also exist for employees, which is not always assured these days. They are very proud of their employee training program. Their sewers received training and certification by VestechPro, allowing them to improve their skills both for their own pride in their work and the quality of the products being sewn. Consulting services were also brought in to hold workshops and sessions with their sales team, empowering them with new skills and strategies, motivating them, and increasing their much-needed confidence as members of the sales team.

Staffing issues are a problem everywhere these days, and Calko Group is struggling through them like everyone else. They are working on a new labour policy, reviewing compensation at all their locations, investing in more professional training, and working on an incentive program as well as focusing on recruitment of new employees and engagement and satisfaction of their existing employees. The Calko Group truly values and appreciates their employees, something that is not found everywhere. If an employee values their job, then they, too, will become a value to the company they work for. I believe that the Calko Group understands this and puts it into practice.



Giving back is taken seriously by the Calko Group, and they give back in many ways. *Mission Hall, Sun Youth*, and the *Charity Hub* are just a few of the groups that they support. Giving back to their employees and to the communities in which they do business is important to the Calko Group. Giving back not only benefits those receiving but keeps the company as a vital and recognizable community presence. Everyone benefits when a company invests itself in the community where it does business.

As a vital part of the textile industry in Canada, the Calko Group is a strong contributor to the Canadian economy. The Calko Group does not only provide jobs and benefits to the local economies where they operate, but they contribute greatly to Canada's gross domestic product, providing the Canadian government with a needed source of tax revenue. As seen during the pandemic, the need for jobs, tax dollars, domestic production and innovation, and a healthy and vital textile industry should all be understood by the government of Canada.

**The Calko Group is truly a success story to be held up as an example to other Canadian textile companies. With their dedication to "Innovation, Quality, and Commitment," I am sure that they will continue to be a success story well into the future.**



About the author: Thomas H. Boehm writes about the textile industry and works as a circular knitting machine technician at a small mill in rural Nova Scotia, Canada. He likes to spend his spare time with his family, dog, and chickens.

See our website, for more information.

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