

Healthy, wealthy, and wise

Shauna Oakie jumped from the intensity of the trauma unit to the intensity of not one, but two, small businesses

by Julie V. Watson





LOUISE VESSEY



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In the village of Bossey Bangou, Niger Etruscan funded the construction of 2 classrooms. In 2005, the village middle school had the largest attendance ever, and successfully graduated 28 students.

Health



Etruscan with the assistance of the Dartmouth Rotary Club, funded the construction of the "CSI John et Margaret Savage de Touré" medical clinic in Niger. This clinic offers primary health care to a population of 15,000.

Agriculture



Etruscan has undertaken a number of successful agricultural initiatives that train and introduce local farmers to new crops which supplement the traditional maize production.

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After a working life immersed in critical care and cardiac health, registered nurse Shauna Oakie

experienced a personal change of heart. It was 2000, and she was working as an on-call nurse at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Charlottetown, but the uncertain hours were taking a toll on her, both physically and emotionally. "I was on call 24 hours a day, and you had to be at their beck and call," explains Oakie. "I had a mortgage and two kids, and I just couldn't do it anymore. It was a very rough way to live."

Six years later, and now "just shy of 50," Oakie is in business for herself, running two small firms that have found their own niches in the world of workplace health and wellness. One of her companies, ExamOne, does health checks and assessments on Prince Edward Island for life-insurance companies. She has just started a second company called Innovative HealthwoRx, a consultancy that teaches managers and entrepreneurs how to keep their employees healthy and productive and less likely to do what Oakie herself had to do—leave her job because it was making her unhappy.

"We are the prescription for healthier and happier employees," she tells clients. "Our programs promote healthy eating, physical activity, ergonomics, positive mental health, and improving quality of life, as well as team-building exercises to improve the co-operation, commitment, and collaboration of employees." Services include flu-shot clinics and workshops on various topics, including financial management, behavioural change, and work-life balance. "I don't make quite the amount of money that I used to make as a nurse, but I'm OK with that," Oakie says brightly. "Back at the hospital, I was in what I call the 'comfort zone.' I knew how much I'd get paid. I knew when my breaks would be. Now, every day is like a mystery. It's great!"

Oakie's first business, ExamOne, came to her almost by

The cold hard facts

Statistics show that people in an unhealthy workplace are:

- 3 times more likely to experience heart disease
- 3 times more likely to have back pain
- 2 to 3 times more likely to incur injuries
- 2 to 3 times more likely to have mental-health problems

Every workplace has health-related costs: short- and long-term disability, stress-related sick leave, absenteeism, presenteeism, and drug costs, to name a few. Wellness programs ultimately return on investment anywhere from \$3 to \$6 for every dollar invested.

"In today's global market, it isn't the service or the product that is a company's No. 1 asset, it's the employees," says Shauna Oakie. "Employers have to be innovative to attract and keep high-calibre employees and increase their productivity and profitability. The key is to generate a 'community' in the workplace. If the employee is feeling healthy and well, not only physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, they are ultimately happier and more productive. This has been proven time and again in Europe, the United States, and Canada."

chance. Six years ago she heard that the nurse who owned the franchise was looking to get out. The work sounded manageable—she would take the blood pressure and do general health exams of people who wanted to buy life insurance—so she decided to take over the franchise and has been growing it steadily ever since. “It had about 8% to 10% of the market when I bought it,” she says, “and now it’s up to 42%.”

Oakie has been learning about business steadily, guided by both her husband, the president of Kent Homes International, and by ACOA and the P.E.I. Business Women’s Association. As her ExamOne franchise flourished, she became eager to try her hand at a business that she could build from the ground up. That’s when she got the idea for Innovative HealthwoRx from a newspaper article. “I read that a corporation had set up its own health-and-wellness program,” she says. “I thought that was fabulous; that’s what we need, businesses caring about their employees’ well-being.”

Through Innovative HealthwoRx, Oakie now helps companies help their employees. Why would they do that? Because healthy and happy employees are also productive and loyal. “One of our clients is Mark’s Work Wearhouse here on the Island,” she says. “The owner has a positive outlook. He doesn’t want to see his employees turn over. He knows that to lose employees costs him money in new training.”

When a company hires HealthwoRx, Oakie interviews all of the employees and, depending on the contract, might even give them physicals. Then she meets with the business owner or manager to review the results. “The first thing most employers usually say is that all of their employees are healthy—nobody’s overweight; they’re all fine,” says Oakie. “That’s usually a huge misconception. You can’t make the assumption that your employees are fine and dandy because you’re offering them gym memberships.”

HealthwoRx gives employers a much more accurate portrait of the physical and

mental health of their employees, then it consults with dietitians, physiotherapists, and psychologists to help address any problems. It’s a lot of work, but Oakie shows employers stats indicating that a dollar spent now on employee health can save five or six times that amount in the long run. Besides, hiring HealthwoRx isn’t as expensive as some might think; it costs anywhere from \$9 to \$35 per employee per month. “If an employer has a benefit program, I ask them, how much is that costing you? How much is workers’ compensation costing you?” says Oakie. “The bottom line is that if you’ve got some fabulous employees and you don’t want to lose them, we can help you keep them, and we can do it within your budget.”

Oakie’s own budgets are still tight. Her revenues aren’t yet high enough that she can afford to hire any help for accounting or marketing; she does it all. Nevertheless, she doesn’t regret leaving her comfort zone at the hospital. “I know that we’re going to be successful,” she says. “It’s hard work, but that’s a good thing.” 🍷

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