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**2025 WINNER**

**CALIBER**

## **CALIBER PROJECTS: WEATHERING THE STORM WITH CULTURE AS COMPASS**

During one of the worst construction slowdowns Vancouver, Canada, has experienced in decades, Caliber Projects has refused to back down. Instead, it's honing its skills, strengthening its team, and doubling down on the culture that has made it one of the most respected builders in British Columbia.

"We got punched in the face this year," said founder and CEO Justin Bontkes, referring to the sudden downturn in the housing market that cut Caliber's projected project starts in half. "But we're not backing down. We're playing offense."

That mindset isn't new. It's been embedded in Caliber's DNA from the start—shaped by a set of values as tough and enduring as the projects they take on: **Own it. Crush it. Love it.** These values aren't just words—they've become the company's way of operating. And now, during a period of uncertainty, that system is demonstrating its value.

### **CULTURE UNDER PRESSURE**

Over the past 18 months, 21 employees have left Caliber—a notable number for a team now with fewer than 90 members. Instead of viewing the turnover as purely negative, leaders saw it as an opportunity to improve alignment.

"About a third of those were tough losses," Bontkes admitted. "But the rest weren't the right fit. We're building something bigger than anyone's role. We need people who are ready to serve the team, not just themselves."

What emerged wasn't just a leaner team, but a stronger one. According to Tim Gonsalves, who leads People and Culture at Caliber, "The adversity forced us to get real. People started stepping up. They began owning problems and supporting each other in ways we hadn't seen before."

## TRAINING FOR THE LONG GAME

As project pipelines became more limited, the leadership team intentionally shifted their focus: they no longer only discussed profitability. They started prioritizing understanding and helping team members see how their decisions impact the business.

They implemented tool-tracking systems and asked frontline workers to start monitoring spending on everything from fasteners to fuel. The goal wasn't to create pressure, but to provide perspective. "Most of our team has never lived through a downturn," Gonsalves explained. "They needed to see how small expenses roll up to big results."

With ongoing financial literacy training and clear, visual scoreboards used across teams, even young workers began contributing meaningfully to daily project decisions. In one case, a 19-year-old crew member identified the trade partner responsible for slowing down the day's critical path—an insight that saved time and money. "Those are the moments that prove this works," Bontkes said. "They're not just employees—they're businesspeople now."

## INVESTING IN THE A-TEAM

Instead of reacting with fear or making widespread cuts, Caliber's leadership chose a more focused strategy: identify the A-players and build the future with them. "We're sitting down one-on-one with our top contributors," Bontkes said. "We want them to know: you're not just surviving this season with us—you're shaping what comes next."

It's part of a broader strategy to build loyalty by providing clarity and vision, even during chaos. One result of this approach is the creation of a "20 Mile March Committee," a cross-functional team responsible for identifying the most important metrics over the next decade. "It's not just about hitting this year's plan," Bontkes said. "It's about building a model that lasts 10, 15, 20 years."

## LEADING WITH TRANSPARENCY

While many companies tighten the cone of silence during tough times, Caliber took the opposite approach: more communication, not less.

Huddles—both company-wide and site-specific—became a daily routine. Employees at all levels were included in updates on project status, key numbers, and critical business decisions. Scoreboards were made visible and easy to access. Every team member could see performance and find a way to influence it.

This open style of leadership is rooted in the principles of The Great Game of Business, which Caliber adopted several years ago. The Game gave them not only tools for transparency but also a framework for building trust, teaching financial literacy, and giving every employee a stake in the outcome. "There's no 'us vs. them' here," said Gonsalves. "We all win or lose together."

## STANDING OUT BY STAYING TRUE

What makes Caliber stand out isn't just its buildings. It's the way it builds people. With a transparent bonus structure linked to team performance, personalized development plans, and a clear invitation to engage in business decisions, Caliber has become a magnet for talent. Their retention rate of A-players exceeds 90%, and industry buzz is growing.

“**WE DON'T REALLY THINK OF OURSELVES AS HAVING COMPETITORS, WE'RE JUST DOING THINGS OUR WAY. AND THE RIGHT PEOPLE WANT TO BE PART OF IT.**”

— **TIM GONSALVES,**  
MANAGER OF PEOPLE & CULTURE

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Caliber isn't pretending the storm is over. But they're not just waiting for it to pass either. They're building within it. With a resilient team, a clear purpose, and a playbook rooted in service and ownership, they're demonstrating that culture isn't just a nice-to-have. It's a true competitive advantage.

As Bontkes says, “I kind of like a good fight. This is what makes the wins matter.”

### BY THE NUMBERS: CALIBER'S CULTURE IN ACTION

- **88 current employees**, with a 90%+ retention rate among A-players
- 21 team members departed in 18 months
  - only a third were considered “regrettable losses”
- **60-70% of staff are meaningfully engaged** in business operations and financials
- **Daily Huddles** and **visible scoreboards** are used across projects and departments
- **Quarterly bonus program** with up to Level 10 payouts tied to team performance
- **\$70,000+ raised for local charities** during the “Caliber Cause” initiative
- **High-Involvement Planning** underway through the “20 Mile March Committee”