With the organization riding a virtually uninterrupted three-year hiring spree, something out of the ordinary happened at Ottawa-based engineering firm Attain Group a few months back.

A couple of employees actually quit.

At most businesses, such an occurrence would be greeted with a shrug. But such is not the case at Attain, which was founded 18 years ago and oversees the installation of smart-building infrastructure such as wireless communications networks,
cybersecurity systems and other technology at offices, malls and other sites like colleges and universities in multiple provinces.

“Up until probably three months ago, we had almost a 100 per cent retention rate,” says president and CEO Derrick Hanson. “Nobody ever left.”

It’s a situation most employers can only dream of, and employee loyalty remains a hallmark of Attain’s work culture even as the firm’s headcount has more than tripled from 12 to 37 over the past three years.

It’s no surprise to Hanson, then, that Attain topped this year’s Best Places to Work Ottawa competition, an annual program organized by OBJ and the Ottawa Board of Trade.

**Employer and employee surveys**
Participants were ranked according to the results of employee and employer questionnaires and surveys conducted by the U.S.-based Workforce Research Group.

Employees were asked to rate their workplaces’ performance in categories such as leadership and planning, corporate culture, job satisfaction, training and pay and benefits. Employers, meanwhile, filled out an extensive questionnaire that determined what types of benefits they provided to employees and assessed how their workplaces address issues ranging from work-life balance to diversity.

OBJ publisher Michael Curran says this year’s recipients stand out for their commitment to making employee well-being and job satisfaction a top priority day in and day out.

“Engaging employees is getting a lot more complicated these days,” Curran said. “It’s like a perfect storm on the human resources front. The pandemic caused employees to re-assess their personal and professional priorities, hybrid workplaces created all sorts of workspace permutations and now changing economic conditions are leading to wage pressure.

**Valuable lessons**
“With all this chaos, we’ve found 10 companies that – based on direct feedback from their employees – are excelling at engagement. Hats off to them for figuring this out. I think all of us have some lessons to learn from these companies.”

This year’s list includes some well-known names in technology, construction and other sectors.
Attain led the way, thanks in part to offering employees perks such as flex time over the Christmas holidays and regular social outings. But Hanson says the company prides itself on going the extra mile to ensure it’s doing everything it can to make employees as happy and productive as possible.

In 2019, for example – almost a year before the pandemic triggered a wholesale shift to remote work – Attain’s leadership team realized that working from home “might be a bonus for people,” Hanson says.

The company hired an industrial psychologist to gauge employees’ attitudes toward remote work and determine what financial, technological and HR support they would need to make it viable.

Little did Hanson and his team realize how valuable that move would turn out to be just a few months later when COVID-19 forced employers to shutter offices and pivot to a new way of working virtually overnight.

“We literally went from … OK, we should probably do this – it’s good for staff morale, flexibility, family, work–life balance and all of that … to (flipping) the switch the same day without skipping a bit,” he says. “That was driven from our culture.”

Companies from across the region took part in the Best Places to Work survey process. Eligible firms were required to be in business for at least a year as well as maintain an office and have a minimum of 15 employees in the National Capital Region.

This year’s 10 recipients will be recognized at a cocktail reception at the Westin Ottawa on Tuesday, Oct. 4. The 2022 Best Places to Work recipients are:

- Attain
- Ottawa Tourism
- Noibu
- Fellow
- Rossmann Architecture
- Knak
- Decisive Group
- Dilfo Mechanical
- Solink
- Amsted Design–Build