

# Mutual trust makes Schneider an impactful company



▲ Schneider Electric Canada offers employees paid time off to volunteer with local community groups.

**E**stefania Gonzalez, now the end user sales director for Schneider Electric Canada Inc., was working in her native Spain for the French multinational when she was invited to join its Canadian arm. What began as a temporary position has since evolved into a 13-year stay, along with a husband she met here and two children, aged six and three.

The globe-spanning digital automation and energy management powerhouse, Gonzalez appreciated, had shown no hesitation in asking a woman to take on a foreign assignment. But she recalls feeling a little unsure about her future prospects as her first pregnancy arrived.

"I was determined to take a year's maternity leave, but after I returned, would I still be able to advance?" she wondered. "I spoke to my superiors and the people around me, and they were totally reassuring because

Schneider's policy and culture were totally supportive."

They were right, Gonzalez says. "So much so, second time I took 14 months mat leave!" Throughout, Gonzalez has continued to scale the ranks at Schneider.

Clear echoes of Gonzalez's story can be heard when Claire Guichard, Schneider's human resources vice-president Canada, talks of the launch of her 20-year career. As a new grad from a university in France's Brittany region, and seeking English fluency, Guichard headed as far afield as she could, to Australia.

There, she took English classes by day and worked in an Italian restaurant at night, where she met three HR workers who arranged a three-month training program for her. Back in France, when she applied for an apprenticeship at Schneider, Guichard was struck by how her interviewers "really liked that story."

Gonzalez and Guichard, who both later passed through in-company women leadership courses, had found themselves working for a company that, in the VP's words, puts a premium on employees "willing to go outside their comfort zones."

*"The more someone feels safe to speak up, the better we can perform, the better we can innovate, and the better we can deliver to our clients."*

— Claire Guichard  
Human Resources  
Vice-President Canada

In 2021, when Schneider asked Guichard what she wanted to do next – which was to get deeper into sales HR in a place where her daughters could learn English in the same immersive manner as their mother – the company offer came quickly: how about Canada? "Well, I didn't think too much, right? Just had a discussion with my husband and we said, 'Wow, let's make it happen'."

"Schneider itself is willing to leave its own comfort zone," says Guichard. "We know we cannot deliver anything to our clients if we don't have that engagement from our people, and that requires trust between employees and leaders." So Schneider Electric Canada moved beyond the global corporation's already flexible approach to the post-pandemic work life, Guichard says, "We really wanted to provide

intentional flexibility and increase our focus on employee well-being. We also wanted to empower managers and their teams to decide how they wanted to collaborate, how often and when they wanted to come back to the office, whether for a brainstorm or a lunch, so they could create moments that matter to them."

It was Schneider's way of engendering trust in its employees, the VP continues. "By showing our trust in them, that we believe they can be counted on to perform, it also instills a sense of stability, belonging and psychological safety that is resonating across the company."

That in turn is a vital and necessary key to Schneider being what all its employees want it to be, Guichard believes – an impactful company. "The more someone feels safe to speak up, the better we can perform, the better we can innovate, and the better we can deliver to our clients." ■

*Advertising feature produced by Canada's Top 100 Employers, a division of Mediagroup Canada Inc. The Globe and Mail's editorial department was not involved.*

1,951 full-time staff in Canada

45 years, average age of all employees

20 weeks, maternity leave top-up pay

1,200+ staff volunteer hours last year

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