

Gore – Success with Simplicity

2009 Great Place to Work® Award Winner



W.L. Gore & Associates, turned 50 years old in 2008. For 25 of those years, Gore has been recognized as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For in America, first in a book by that name published in 1984, and most recently on the 2009 list of Best Companies to Work For just published in Fortune magazine. Gore is one of only five companies to have achieved this distinction and, as with all the others, the primary reason is the resonance of the culture that Gore has created and maintained over time.

Gore's strength can be seen in its innovative products, creative idea generation and financial success. The source of all this strength, it's culture, is a bit more elusive to describe, yet clearly visible. According to associates who work at Gore the culture is reflected in freedom and commitments. People experience tremendous freedom at Gore: the freedom to talk with whomever they need or want to, the freedom to make comments and provide input, the freedom to bring who they are to work, and the freedom to make commitments.

Everyone is asked to commit to the four beliefs and four guiding principles that influence everything that happens at Gore. The beliefs include belief in the individual, the power of small teams, all in the same boat, and long-term view; and the principles are freedom, fairness, commitment and waterline. While these beliefs and principles came from the founders, they are lived out every day by Gore Associates.

Hiring for Culture Fit

Gore has a very low turnover rate – hovering around 8% for the past 5 years - which is about half the average for its industry. The strength and clarity of the culture at Gore contribute greatly to this low turnover, as does making sure that when a new associate is hired he or she is right for the culture. At Gore, finding people who can deal with ambiguity, who have a lot of initiative and who can work within the infamous lattice structure is key.

Typically five or more associates will interview a candidate, depending upon the role/position that is open, with potential teammates and peers as well as leaders and HR associates participating in the interviews. Extensive reference checks are used to gain a rich understanding of the candidate's work style and values on the job as much as to explore job qualifications.

Once invited to join the company a new associate participates in a number of orientation meetings, one during the first month, and others throughout the following months. The first orientation combines a welcome to the Gore culture with an introduction to practical fundamentals. The day-long "Welcome Aboard" program includes an overview of cultural principles and practices, as well as basics such as benefits, environmental safety and how to log on to Gore computers and voice mail. Discussions focus on 'who we are, how we are structured, how we get things done' and how Gore may be different from a more traditionally organized company. The differences are of course part of what is attractive about Gore, yet they could be a stumbling block for experienced hires who have already participated in another type of workplace culture.

To address the needs of experienced hires, Gore has created a series of programs to help them engage quickly in their work and also learn about the important elements of teamwork and sponsorship that will be crucial to their ability to be successful. Experienced hires are taught about networking opportunities to help them find projects they might want to join. Sponsors of experienced hires (every new associate gets one) are given special training to insure that they can help the experienced hires integrate themselves into the organization.

In some organizations, it's sink or swim when you first get on board, which can lead to a rocky start, higher turnover and project disruptions. Yet when someone has made it through the rigorous screening process and actually landed a job at Gore, sponsors and HR associates want to go all out to make sure that person fits in smoothly so that projects

W. L. Gore & Associates

Web address.....	www.gore.com
Corporate Headquarters.....	Newark, Delaware
Year founded.....	1958
CEO	Terri Kelly
Industry.....	Manufacturing & Production
Total Worldwide revenues...	\$2,400,000,000
US Employees (FT, PT, Temp) ..	5,774
Job Applications in past year ..	19,108

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stay on track and teams remain strong. All of this emphasis on helping people fit in to the Gore culture certainly pays off in the loyalty expressed by some associates:

“*When I got hired, I possessed many skills that Gore appreciated. However, my social skills were not the greatest. I was a work hog, but thought that I was proving myself to others, not realizing that I offended many. It took leadership quite a few times to point this out and I just wouldn't see their point of view since I had worked about 20 years with this type of work ethic (more like an attitude). They saw the potential in me and never gave up. I'm very grateful working for a corporation that not only treats you fairly, but humanely as well. I am not only a better person to work with, but also have taken these skills I've learned here and incorporated them into my personal life and it's a great feeling to come as far as I have. I owe it to the culture that Gore was founded on which is practiced to this day.*”

“*When you get hired at Gore you are given all the opportunities to do a good job. They want and expect people to contribute and take part in the company and desire feedback regularly to make this a better place to work, no matter what your job. They talk about the "Gore Culture" and they actually try to live up and exceed the company expectations by allowing people to grow in their positions and with the company. The average length of service is a good indicator that people WANT to work here. This company expects an employee to do a good job and they give you plenty of room to do that without standing right behind you every minute to check.*”

“*First off, this company trusts you as soon as you walk in the door to make good decisions and by design, decisions are made at the working level and they are made in small teams, so the team works effectively and efficiently. Also, overlaid as part of the culture is an unpretentious workplace where input is expected and respected from all team members, so, everyone is not looking for "the guy at the top" to make a decision that we all merely execute. Lastly, while trust is imparted immediately, over time, respect must be earned by the quality of the decisions that one makes and how they are made. This is how leaders emerge.*”

Commitments

How often do you get to make a commitment at work, to say 'I want to do this', and find that the support of the organization will be behind you, in front of you, and on all sides to help you be successful? At W.L. Gore that happens all the time! Commitments are how people at Gore create what would otherwise be called job responsibilities. Yet here the unique twist on this is that individual associates make their own commitments by selecting their own projects, rather than having them determined by someone else. This practice is the commitment principle in action.

In order for people to be prepared to make future commitments they are expected to put into practice an element of the freedom principle, which involves an expectation that each associate will continually increase her/his skills and contribution. Associates are asked to create individual development plans so that they are always learning, exploring, and ready to make the next commitment. Sponsors help associates to create their development plans, compensation committees discuss development planning in the fall, Plant committees review the plans, divisional and corporate committees look for aggregate developmental needs, review functional competencies and curricula available, and assess how existing skill sets are in sync with training and development opportunities that are available and with future needs.

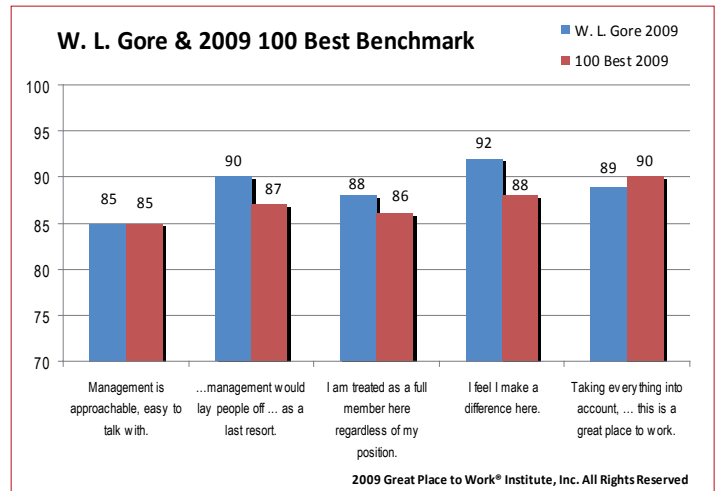
It's a very simple cycle that aims to help associates find the sweet spot in which individual interest and motivation meets up with skills and experience to satisfy a business need. This is all a reflection of one of the core beliefs - Believing in the Individual.

“*At Gore we don't have "job descriptions." We have a set of core commitments and beyond that it's up to each associate whether or not to take on additional commitments in order to grow and develop their career. If asked to take on a new commitment, it's ok to say no if you feel you're already fully committed. From day 1, it's stressed in orientation not to get over-committed. It's very important for associates to have a good work/life balance and be happy and productive in all aspects of their lives. I'm truly proud to be part of this team and never hesitate to tell my friends & family how privileged I feel to be working with such a wonderful group of people.*”

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“ Each of us has the opportunity to decide how we can best contribute to the success of our Enterprise. I am expected - and free - to set my own priorities for working on projects and meeting time schedules, and can ask other Associates for help to meet a commitment, or to adjust the timing within the demands of the business when necessary. Recently I asked another Associate to take over a leading role in a major project, and she did. I have done the same for others. ”



Fun – Life’s Never Dull at Gore

Founder Bill Gore used to tell people that it was important to Make Money and Have Fun, and associates continue to approach their work with that maxim in mind. While Gore makes some very serious products that serve critical functions in medical sciences and telecommunications, the workplace atmosphere could be seen as reminiscent of the basement workshop in the Sycamore’s house in ‘You Can’t Take it With You’ – associates at Gore love their work, love the freedom they have to experiment and create, enjoy the opportunities to collaborate with their peers, and have a lot of fun.

In addition to a large multi-plant holiday party and summer picnic, each plant holds local celebrations of business milestones and there are also numerous Gore sports leagues (volleyball, soccer, bowling, golf, etc.). Profit sharing checks are always given out in a surprise distribution to associates in a group setting, such as a plant meeting. Plants also organize events that may not be completely unique (Halloween costume breakfast, a party with an all-associate band, a chili cook-off, a summer picnic with team competitions, a crab feast, etc.) yet they all reflect the commitment to have fun at work, which is part of the tradition of working at Gore.

“ I have been at Gore for 19 years and have no intention of ever leaving, if I can help it. Gore has offered me numerous opportunities for growth that align with my skill sets. In the last ten years, I’ve grown into roles that didn’t exist previously - they were just in alignment with my strengths and met business needs. We definitely live up to our motto ‘Make money and have fun!’. We do both very well!! ”

“ Our motto is make MONEY and have FUN!! During my original hiring interview with the head of our Division (Ed DeGarbolewski), he was arrested by the Local Police (for a Muscular Dystrophy Association fund raiser). The head of our operations department (Dolph Stiles) had the biggest smile on his face since he had arranged the arrest. Once the police took out Ed, they came back in and then arrested Dolph. The look on Dolph’s face and the laughter of all the other people on site convinced me this could be a great place to work. ”

“ Health and safety is encouraged. We provide onsite massage and have an exercise room for stretch breaks. In addition we provide fun activities for those times you need to take a break from your daily tasks. We have horseshoes, frisbee golf, pingpong, and fusbball tables set up for associates to use. ”

At Gore, associates are invited into an organization that prizes individuality and teamwork. Commitments are promises made to oneself and to others. People are members of small teams in plants with no more than about 200 associates each. Everyone is on a first name basis. It is a unique workplace in which people shine, creativity flourishes and money is made. Who wouldn’t want to work there?

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Unique Practices

There are many programs offered at W. L. Gore & Associates to support employees' growth and development, and to insure that Gore's unique culture is maintained and strengthened.

Below, a variety of W. L. Gore's Best People Practices are highlighted.

Promoting Diversity

At Gore, a passive approach to diversity training – off the shelf programs that simply shared information - was not to be. Gore associates created a series of workshops titled "Understanding Diversity: The Day-to-Day Impact" to raise awareness of potential micro-inequities in daily interactions—the little messages sent every day - that can inadvertently lead people to feel de-valued or alienated instead of respected and engaged in the workplace. When these workshops were rolled out at Gore they saw a participation rate of 90% of associates (approximately 2,400 people) from Gore's Maryland/Delaware cluster of plants. The associates in Gore Germany have found that the workshop content translates well to their environment, with the United Kingdom being the next place to introduce the workshops.

While the focus of the workshops was novel, they are also being delivered in a novel way. After successfully facilitating the workshop with a handful of teams, the diversity champion wanted to expand it to the entire cluster of 16 plants in her area, and deliver it in a relatively short timeframe to create a groundswell of awareness. She invited associates who had a record of followership, credibility and Gore culture understanding to facilitate the workshop. After receiving a strong response, she held a two-day training session to deputize 52 associates to deliver the workshop. Feedback on the workshops was overwhelmingly positive.

Healthy Work Environments

Gore plants are all smoke-free, hold an abundance of natural light, contain offices of similar size (no matter who the occupant is), and house shifts of a limited number of associates (approximately 200). It's one way that associates in any one facility are encouraged to know each other and what's going on in the plant. At the same time, where it's possible, plants are clustered to facilitate the sharing of resources. Associates benefit from working on a small, familiar plant team with easy access to other associates and facilities within a 10- or 15-minute drive.






Gore's campus-like plant settings lend themselves to recreational opportunities. The Delaware-Maryland plant cluster offers two on-site fitness centers, soccer fields, basketball courts, volleyball courts, a driving range, nature area, trails and large recreational pavilion. The Arizona cluster includes a walking trail and volleyball and basketball courts.

Face to Face Communication

Direct, face-to-face communication is also the preference at Gore when there's disappointing news to share. In situations such as the sale of a business or closure of a facility, a facility-wide meeting is typically held in which a divisional or corporate leader speaks to the group, and then the group is broken into smaller, HR- or leader-facilitated groups for discussion and questions. Leaders then meet regularly with the team to provide updates. If appropriate, an employee assistance program provider is on hand to meet with associates.

A recent example occurred following a decision to consolidate two plants in one new location. Plant meetings were held in which the divisional leader and HR generalist gave a presentation on the rationale for the move and took questions from associates. Several months later, plant meetings were held in four facilities around the world to discuss the news that Gore had been approached by several companies about the sale of some of their product lines. Associates were not shy about asking questions. The corporate leader who works on merger/acquisition activity was the primary presenter in the U.S. plants, directly answering associates' questions about the possibilities. Bob Gore was in at-

Great Place to Work® Model®

Dimension	How it plays out in the workplace	
	Credibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications are open and accessible • Competence in coordinating human and material resources • Integrity in carrying out vision with consistency 	T
	Respect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting professional development and showing appreciation • Collaboration with employees on relevant decisions • Caring for employees as individuals with personal lives 	R
	Fairness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity-balanced treatment for all in terms of rewards • Impartiality-absence of favoritism in hiring and promotions • Justice-lack of discrimination and process for appeals 	U
	Pride <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In personal job, individual contributions • In work produced by one's team or work group • In the organization's products and standing in the community 	S
	Camaraderie <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to be oneself • Socially friendly and welcoming atmosphere • Sense of "family" or "team" 	T

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tendance as well. Associates were uncomfortable with the possibility of a sale, but leaders were forthright and accountable to the associates for the process.

Compensation – Pay for Contributions

At the heart of Gore's pay philosophy is a straightforward concept articulated by Bill Gore: Compensation should be in proportion to the contribution the associate makes to the financial success of the Enterprise. First and foremost, each associate is compensated based on his/her relative placement on a peer-ranked contribution list. The compensation of associates with similar responsibilities or jobs is also benchmarked across Gore plants and divisions.

On the external side, local, national and global salary surveys are reviewed to make sure associates are being compensated competitively in comparison with companies in similar industries. A comprehensive compensation management and salary planning system is used, along with information from dozens of salary surveys to ensure that the pay distribution is competitive.

While variable pay is a part of the total compensation package, a greater portion of total cash compensation is allocated to base salary than to variable pay. This helps to maintain the focus on associates' performance over the long term, encompassing past, present and potential future contributions. Top contributors are encouraged to focus on sound, long-term investments and decisions aimed at the overall health of the company, rather than on behavior directed to meet specific short-term functional or divisional goals (reflecting the spirit of "all in the same boat" and taking the "long-term view," to cite two cultural fundamentals).

Individual recognition

There are a number of programs that recognize associates who model the Gore culture. In one plant, associates receive "culture bucks" for actions that reinforce the culture, and the bucks qualify them for a monthly prize drawing (prizes include gift certificates, clothing, special parking, etc.) All U.S. facilities now honor a "water carrier" every other month, an associate who contributes to the perpetuation of the culture. Several plants have ongoing "gotcha" awards that recognize associates who go the extra mile, as nominated by their fellow associates.

Any Company Can Create a Great Workplace

Our Mission is to Help Them Do It



Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. has conducted pioneering research on the characteristics of great workplaces for over 25 years. We believe all companies can become great places to work, and our mission is to help them succeed. Our Great Place to Work® Model® is recognized as the standard for assessing great workplaces. In 40 countries around the world, we are proud to:

- **Recognize the Best Companies** for their achievements through our international Best Companies lists. In the U.S., these lists include Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For®, as well as the "Best Small & Medium Companies to Work for in America" published in collaboration with SHRM.
- **Help companies create and sustain great workplace cultures** through our consulting services. Our data collection tools (employee survey, focus groups, 360° professional development tool) educational workshops and training programs, action planning system, and strategic advising services all support the transformation process within any organization. The Institute's unique access to Best Companies' data allows us to offer unparalleled benchmarking opportunities, best practice information, and transformation insight to our consulting clients.
- **Share resources, best practices, and Institute research** through our education services. These include peer networking groups, workshops, conferences, and publications which enable organization leaders to learn directly from each other, as well as benefit from our wealth of knowledge and lessons learned from the Best Companies and our clients.

For more information, please contact us:

Global Headquarters

Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc.
169 11th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415.503.1234
Fax: 415.503.0014

info@greatplacetowork.com
www.greatplacetowork.com

Additional Resources

- Join us for the 2009 Great Place to Work® Conference, May 6-9 in Miami Florida, to learn more about how to create great workplaces directly from Best Companies leaders. For more information, visit www.greatplacetowork-conference.com
- Nominate your company to be on Best Companies lists in North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia by visiting www.greatplacetowork.com/best/index.php
- Consulting Services: We believe passionately that any organization of any size or industry can become a great workplace. Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. consulting services are based on 25 years of researching Best Companies, and our in-depth knowledge of how companies transform can help you achieve higher levels of productivity and profit. Through our assessment, action planning, and advisory services, we can help you to measure, benchmark, and positively impact employees' experiences of your organization.