

Building Trust by Welcoming Employees

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Great workplaces are unique environments

In great workplaces, employees, managers and leaders work well with each other, sharing a mutual trust and confidence that benefits the entire organization. While there are many qualities that are apparent in great workplaces one key practice that reflects the overall culture of these organizations is their universal commitment to creating a welcoming atmosphere in which people truly feel like they are part of something special.

The idea of working for a great place to work is very appealing to most people and often brings a wistful smile to the face of someone whose current place of employment does not quite measure up. Helping to create a great workplace is also very appealing, especially to managers and leaders who are aware of the tremendous benefits that come to great workplaces. Great workplaces are employee focused – attention is paid to improving working conditions, sharing information, and insuring that adequate training and development are available for all – because an effective, engaged employee who trusts the leaders of the company will be able to make extraordinary contributions to the success of the business

Benefits of Being a Great Place to Work®

Many companies report receiving extraordinary benefits from being a great workplace that affect all aspects of their business operations. Typical “100 Best” companies report that they:

- Receive many more job applications than others in their industry so they can select candidates with the most appropriate skills from a broad pool of applicants.
- Experience a lower level of turnover than others in their industry (turnover cost for one mid-level position in the U.S. is estimated at \$40,000 to \$100,000).
- See reductions in health care costs due to reduced negative impacts of stress on employees.
- Foster greater innovation, creativity and risk taking, supporting companies' efforts to be on the cutting edge of their industries.
- Benefit from higher productivity and profitability than their competitors due to the higher levels of employee cooperation and commitment.

Financial Results

Independent financial analysts have studied the financial performance of "100 Best" companies for years. These studies have continued to confirm that over the long term, great workplaces – as measured most consistently through our 100 Best Companies to Work for list published annually in Fortune magazine – are more financially successful than their ‘non-great’ peers. The financial success of great workplaces is not a hit-or-miss proposition but rather an affirmation of the long-term benefits that come from helping people to cooperate with each other and commit to the vision and future of the firm. For information on specific studies conducted by the Russell Investment Group please see www.greatplacetowork.com/great/graphs.php

How to Get Started

Where to begin when there are so many possibilities? Every great workplace has a few distinct qualities in its culture that are special, and create a foundation for the success of specific unique practices. It's hard to define the cultural factors in a few words, yet several common themes are identified from studying the 100 Best. First, great workplaces are characterized by inclusive environments, in which all employees are invited to participate in the cultural life of the organization. Second, leaders at great workplaces are accessible, sharing information with employees and answering their questions. Third, leaders at great workplaces create an environment in which the fair distribution of rewards, recognition and opportunities is rigorously pursued. All great workplaces are also characterized by a sense of being on a journey – there is never an end to the process of becoming a great place to work – it is something people work at every day.

Welcoming People Into the Workplace

When employees feel welcomed they will:

- Be able to develop genuine relationships with each other that strengthen their individual ties to co-workers and the larger organization
- Readily provide support and assistance when it is needed as they are part of a community
- More easily integrate themselves into their work teams, thus speeding up the time from initial hire to success at work

There are a tremendous variety of practices that can be implemented to create a welcoming atmosphere. Employees can be welcomed when they first start with an orientation program, invitations to lunch, and a 'new hire' buddy to help them navigate the unwritten rules of the organization. Employees can be welcomed every day when a culture exists in which saying hello, and talking about activities outside of work are common practices.

The following Best Practice examples from a few of the Best Companies to Work For highlight some of the great ways that these companies have gone about welcoming their employees and reinforcing their unique cultures in the process.

Best People Practice© Examples

MITRE

MITRE, #60 on this years *Fortune's* 100 Best Companies to Work For® list, is a non-profit IT consulting firm based in Virginia, with close to 6,000 employees. Managers and leaders spend a lot of energy welcoming new employees and making sure they successfully get acclimated to their new work environment.

Welcome emails are sent out to introduce new employees to others in their department, and some senior vice presidents send personal notes to each new employee. New employees are also invited to a 'get-acquainted meeting' soon after they start work. Pictures of new employees are posted on department bulletin boards and each week the names of new employees are posted on electronic information displays in common areas in each building.

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Operations and support staff have a goal that by the end of the first day's orientation, each employee has a working computer with functioning software and a desk drawer filled with the basic tools for getting down to work. It is also standard practice for new employees to receive welcome emails and phone calls from the help desk, information center, security, and others to make sure everything is working, to answer any questions, and to let the employee know how to reach them as new questions come up.

As one employee said

"I was delighted by how much time, energy, and organization is given to the New Employee Orientation. The entire week was completely reassuring that I made the correct choice for my next career move to The MITRE Corporation. Not only did I feel assimilated and equipped with the appropriate tools and contacts to start my new job, but I felt welcomed on a personal level." –

Google

At Google, #1 on this year's list, hiring and welcoming new employees has been a critical part of the company's efforts during the past few years of extraordinary growth. Leaders and managers at Google seek to ensure that each new hire feels special from the moment they join Google. New hires, called Nooglers, begin their time at Google with an all-day orientation.

Speakers come from different departments to talk to the Nooglers, a special tour of the campus is provided, as are folders with benefit information and a coupon for a free massage and discounts for a car wash. At the end of the day, Nooglers are picked up by their mentors and receive a special escort to their work areas where they are greeted with welcome balloons and a bag of chocolates.

The Google Buddy (technical person) stops by during the week to ensure each new employee is set up with computers and to assist with any technical questions or concerns. Mentors play a big role in helping the Noogler adjust to the new work environment. They stay with their Noogler until they feel completely comfortable and continue as a direct resource for any future needs. To round out the first week, Nooglers are recognized at weekly TGIF events, with their names and what group they work in shown on a large screen. They also get their first chance to feel part of Google as they sit in the front rows as Google founders Larry and Sergey talk shop.

A few employee comments confirm the success of Google's welcoming activities:

"I was really impressed with the openness and amount of information given to Nooglers during orientation and throughout the first week."

"I couldn't believe all the speakers that take time to come and speak to Nooglers during the first day orientation."

"My group had a special orientation where I was introduced to my group. It really made me feel special."

"Surprised about how many employees went out of their way to help me and that they came to me to help and I didn't need to go to them for help."

Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Bright Horizons, #92 on this year's list is a provider of high quality child-care at the work site. With over 14,000 employees, and in an industry with an often transient workforce, their ability to attract, hire and retain skilled employees is critical to their success. When a new employee starts at Bright Horizons they are welcomed into a community, with the first day treated as if it is a birthday.

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This approach is taken to convey people's excitement about the new employee's decision to join the Bright Horizons family. There is also a clear understanding of the business significance of the 'first day at work' so from the start, Bright Horizons staff seek to instill trust, mutual respect, a strong work ethic, as well as a sense of fun into the welcoming experience.

When new hires start, everything is ready to go – at the corporate office, the new employee's name is placed on his or her workspace, a key scan security card has been provided to insure access to the corporate building, and all paperwork is done before the first day. The phone system, including voice mail, an e-mail account, working computer, and desk are all ready, to insure that each new hire is able to do their work, and does not need to fuss around with logistics.

Each new employee receives a welcome letter at their home and when they arrive at work there are a series of orientation activities that are geared to their role within the company. New Teacher Orientation begins immediately upon hire and continues through the first three months of employment. Similarly, for their New Manager Orientation, new managers receive an individualized orientation program geared to prepare them for their role through a review of specific topics and skill building activities.

Throughout the first weeks or months of employment, each new employee is 're-welcomed' at numerous events. One staff member wrote, "I never went to a meeting where I was not introduced and made to feel welcome." Staff meetings are one mechanism for keeping employees form across the many on-site locations connected to each other and the larger organization. People gather as a whole team each month at the on-site offices and every quarter at the home office. At these meetings new employees are recognized and have an opportunity to share information about themselves and their recent experiences at work.

The Bottom Line: Trust

Regardless the specific form of the practice, any effort to improve your workplace will need to be considered by how it enhances the level of trust between employees and management. Building an inclusive community from day one is possible, and will be helped by welcoming every new hire with a specific orientation program that provides answers to questions, people to rely on, the resources needed to get work done, and a sense of the special and unique culture of the organization. The goal is always to be able to have your employees say "I trust the people I work for, take pride in what I do and enjoy the people I work with"



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.

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