

A Great Workplace
in the Making:
Comdata Corporation's
Ongoing Efforts



Comdata[®] Corporation is redefining the movement of money and information through innovative payment solutions. Comdata provides custom solutions for a wide range of industries such as transportation, retail, government services, aviation, construction, service businesses, restaurants and hospitality. For nearly forty years, Comdata has pioneered electronic payment solutions that include credit and debit cards, gift and loyalty cards, fleet, fuel, payroll, purchasing and T&E. These solutions respond to the needs of the marketplace and create successes for businesses, their customers, and employees. Headquartered in Brentwood, Tennessee, Comdata is made up of more than 1,600 employees serving more than 20,000 customers in 20 countries worldwide.

Striving for satisfaction

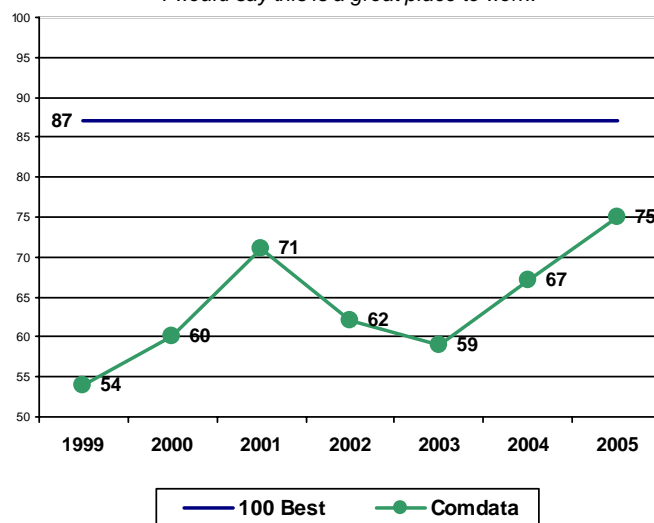
Comdata creates solutions for employee satisfaction in the same way they create solutions for their customers. In 1999, they engaged Great Place to Work[®] Institute, Inc. to measure their workplace relationships and the level of trust within the organization. Comdata wanted to be the "Employer of Choice" in their surrounding area, as their leaders believe that "satisfied employees lead to satisfied customers". The Great Place to Work[®] Institute's Trust Index[®] survey, a proprietary assessment tool, provides an opportunity to measure how employees are experiencing the organization. Comdata has administered the Trust Index[®] to all of its employees annually for seven consecutive years (1999-2005). In each iteration, employees have assessed levels of trust, pride, and camaraderie within the organization, considering their immediate work groups and the organization as a whole. Upon completion of each survey cycle, management has studied and openly presented to employees survey findings and recommendations made by Great Place to Work[®] Institute consultants.

Comdata showed increasingly positive results from 1999 to 2001, followed by a decline in results beginning in 2002 (as shown at right). In response to this decline Comdata renewed their efforts to understand employees' perspectives of the workplace. Institute consultants recommended that Comdata focus on strengthening communication practices to enhance management's credibility and convey their ongoing commitment to being a great place to work[®], enhance the level of respect felt by employees by ensuring that employees receive appreciation for their good work and extra effort in addition to the training and development they seek, and increase the degree of collaborative decision-

making between managers and employees. With this advice, Comdata management mounted an initiative to not only recover from the lag in survey results, but to create a great workplace that would attract and retain key talent. Comdata leaders strongly believe in and are committed to the efforts of creating a great place to work[®], and to that end, took immediate action in response to these recommendations.

Comdata Trust Index[®] Results 1999-2005

"Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work."



Taking next steps

Diane Cothran, Vice President of Human Resources, partnered with other Comdata leaders to make it a top priority to create a workplace based on trust. Cothran first sought out the support and involvement of Comdata's president, encouraging him to be an active champion of the improvement effort. Soliciting the participation of leaders outside of human resources led to ownership over the initiative, and hardwired the goal of becoming an "Employer of Choice" into the corporate strategy.

One of the first realizations leaders made was that it would be important to bridge the gap between organization-wide and department-level survey results. Employees' perceptions of their senior management and the organization as a whole were less positive than perceptions of work-group management and experiences. Owing to the recommendations of Great Place to Work® Institute consultants and Cothran's belief that "good communication builds trust," leaders focused on enhancing two-way communication between senior leaders and employees. Leaders moved into a "listening period," and held employee meetings to engage in direct dialogue regarding changes, opportunities, and business issues. Human Resources staff also played a key role in leveraging communication as a vehicle to disseminate trust. They involved employees in classes and modules based on each of the five dimensions represented in the Trust Index®: Credibility, Respect, Fairness, Pride, and Camaraderie. These workshops led to employees' engaging in critical conversations where they could understand the dynamics of trust in the workplace and share their ideas for how to enhance the organization's culture.

Collaboration was another identified area of opportunity. Great Place to Work® Institute research tells us that when leadership seeks out and responds to employees' perspectives, an organization gains not only bolstered morale, but also increased efficiency resulting from employees' viable ideas. Heeding this guidance, Comdata management began to encourage greater employee input and feedback. Through both formal and informal meetings, employee ideas and opinions were solicited before decisions were made. One formal method was the use of a Six-Sigma process for involving employees

directly in workplace changes. Employees believe in those initiatives that they feel they have had a part in creating, and these efforts to increase collaboration had a positive payoff for Comdata.

Assuming responsibility

Perhaps the most significant step in their change efforts, Comdata leaders acknowledged that they themselves had responsibility for and ownership of the decrease in results. Backed by senior management, the Human Resources department set out to take action. They brainstormed innovative, yet inexpensive ways to leverage funds and implemented a number of programs with support of senior management. Comdata did not invest a lot of new money into these initiatives, but got creative with the funds they already had. Comdata employees now benefit from:

- Classes and modules based on each of the five dimensions of the Great Place to Work® Model®
- Ongoing encouragement of employee input and feedback
- A commitment to no decisions without collaboration
- Employee listening sessions to provide opportunity for showing appreciation
- Spotlight on departments for recognition
- Updated job descriptions

While some programs are delivered through HR, most of the focus on developing trust is placed on immediate supervisors. Comdata recognizes that in order to become a great workplace, trust is required at all levels, not just senior management.

Continuing on the journey

Comdata department and senior leadership truly believe that trust is a priority in the workplace and recent Trust Index[®] results have rebounded, indicating a strong trust-based culture. Each year, employees recognize and offer praise for the efforts made by senior leaders to strengthen the level of trust in their relationships with employees, and also express frustration with areas that remain in need of attention. The information that Comdata receives from its employees through each iteration of the Trust Index[®] is invaluable in shaping their direction and concentration in creating a great workplace.

Comdata continues to administer the Trust Index[®] survey on an annual basis and uses this employee feedback to evaluate and course correct initiatives along the way. The results of Comdata's seventh Trust Index[®] survey continue to show that increasing numbers of employees see the company as a great workplace. As Comdata continues on its journey to creating a workplace, there will no doubt be bumps along the road, but the key for Comdata will be to learn from those experiences and continue to cultivate a strong culture. The journey of becoming a great workplace is not an easy one, and it requires a long term commitment.

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. We are proud to recognize the best companies; help companies create and sustain great workplaces cultures; and share resources, best practices, and Institute research. For more information, please contact our Global Headquarters:

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