

Staying the Course
of Greatness:
Bright Horizons' Story of
Commitment



Bright Horizons Family Solutions, a leading provider of employer-sponsored child care and early education is no stranger to the benefits derived from a great workplace. Since 2001, they have continuously been recognized as a great place to work® by Fortune's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work for® in America. Managing more than 550 early care and education centers in the United States, Europe and Canada, Bright Horizons is committed to making a difference in the lives of the thousands of children they care for and educate daily, in the communities where they live and work, and with their employees. Bright Horizons serves more than 400 client organizations, including over 90 FORTUNE 500 companies and half of the "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers." Bright Horizons lives their mission of providing innovative programs that help children, families, and employers work together to be their very best.

What makes us special?

Despite the prestige of repeatedly being acknowledged as a "best company", Bright Horizons' leaders became concerned with employee perceptions that caused their ranking to drop from as high as #44 in 2003 to #98 in 2005. Each year, results from Bright Horizons' Trust Index® survey trended slightly downward when employees considered the levels of trust, pride, and camaraderie at Bright Horizons. Leaders' interest in sustaining their positive culture was not only motivated by their list ranking, but more importantly, by preserving and enhancing a workplace which had always been oriented toward employee empowerment, collaboration, and caring and compassionate relationships.

Since multiple employee feedback mechanisms exist at Bright Horizons, leaders felt they already had an accurate sense of opportunities for improvement – what eluded leaders more were the characteristics of the organization that employees considered most unique, special and sacred. Gauging this type of information was especially significant for Bright Horizons given their tremendous growth and plans to acquire greater numbers of early care centers. Maintaining the most highly-regarded practices would be vital to Bright Horizons' continued growth and success.

A plan for more information

In 2005, Bright Horizons engaged the Great Place to Work® Institute to help them better understand what employees value most. Institute consultants used their Trust Audit® methodology, adapting focus groups to take an appreciative approach to understanding what makes Bright Horizons a great

workplace. Special attention was paid to gleaning the best of the past and present in order to strategically inform the future. This method resonated with Bright Horizons' human resources leaders, who especially liked the concept of "reinforcing the positive." Furthermore, focus groups had been particularly powerful indicators for Bright Horizons in the past; feedback from internally-run focus groups in 2002 ultimately led to the creation of Bright Horizons' core values, known as The Heart Principles.

Great Place to Work® Institute consultants facilitated focus groups with close to 100 Bright Horizons employees across multiple locations, in addition to several one-on-one interviews with senior leaders. One of the Institute's fundamental assessment tools, focus groups allow for rich dialogue to occur not only around topics related to those being assessed, but also around unanticipated subjects. Through the focus groups, employees shared the practices that are absolutely crucial to the heart of the organization.

Employee input was then compiled and analyzed, and specific, action-oriented recommendations were presented to Bright Horizons. Institute consultants recommended that leaders preserve and hone what employees saw as vital to the life of the organization: Bright Horizons' thoughtful hiring practices, the accessibility and caliber of senior leadership, The Heart Principles, abundant professional development opportunities, and creative recognition programs. Leaders received a comprehensive report that outlined key findings and a section that allowed leaders to read verbatim employee comments from focus groups. An on-

site presentation was then made to senior leaders by the Great Place to Work® Institute project team defining recommendations for moving forward.

Taking action

Bright Horizons' leaders were better able to inform their strategic plan as they now had clear confirmation of what employees cherished about the organization. Leaders started by creating a videotape that showcased company leaders talking about the joy of Bright Horizons' work. The video was used internally where it resonated with Bright Horizons' employee base and was also used externally as a recruiting tool. Bright Horizons has succeeded in preserving their hiring practices, which continue to include a high level of employee involvement and a genuine concern for the finding "the right fit" for each prospective employee. Bright Horizons was so successful, in fact, they went on to win recognition for their hiring practices in 2005's "Recruiting & Staffing Best In Class Awards" (RASBIC).

Bright Horizons also continues to invest in another area that is key to employees – annual "roadshows" where the company's CEO, David Lissy, and the President and COO, Mary Ann Tocio, travel to multiple early care sites around the country. Employees find these visits to be incredibly valuable as a way to access the organization's most senior leaders and to simultaneously have a voice in the direction of the organization. Dave and Mary Ann solicit employee feedback at every site visit, and then act on suggestions almost immediately when returning to their home office. Great Place to Work® Institute concurred with senior leaders that employees derive tremendous value from the

road shows. In fact, Bright Horizons has since leveraged this meaningful practice to have more impact on teachers by including other members of the senior leadership team and engaging directly with teachers at conferences throughout the world.

Lessons learned

As a result of the Great Place to Work® Institute's recommendations, Bright Horizons senior leaders feel they have greater clarity about what employees value most about the culture and work environment. Katherine Palmer, Vice President of Human Resources, noted that the advice given "validated what we were already doing, but focused it...it gave us a chance to re-inform our strategy. It gave us an impartial 'time-out' and valuable data with which to concentrate our energies."

Bright Horizons demonstrates the long-term commitment necessary to sustaining high levels of trust, pride and camaraderie by keeping multiple feedback mechanisms open to employees, fostering personal connections between leaders and employees, and finding ways to value people and keep them connected. The latest results of Bright Horizons' Trust Index® survey reveal that Bright Horizons has again secured a spot on the 100 Best Companies to Work for® in America list, coming in at #94. As Bright Horizons continues on its journey, leaders will reinvest in sustaining what makes it the agile, mission-driven, unique organization that it is. While Bright Horizons has always aspired to be a great workplace, they have deepened their understanding of what that means to their employees, families and employer sponsors.

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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