

MOST TRUSTED LEADER AWARD

This year the Great Place to Work® Institute has launched its 'Most Trusted Leader' award to honour Ireland's most inspirational leader. We speak to the overall winner of the award, Danuta Gray, CEO of Telefónica O2 Ireland, as well as to the final shortlisted candidates, John Atherton of McDonald's Restaurants of Ireland and the Microsoft Governance Team

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

WHAT defines a great leader? And what is their role in creating and developing a great team? These are two fundamental questions explored throughout this magazine, using examples from local Irish businesses, from multinationals, and from sport.

The Great Place to Work® (GPTW) Institute's new 'Most Trusted Leader' award honours the person in Irish business who, by their words and actions, best exemplifies the three core behaviours necessary for high-trust leadership: credibility, respect, and fairness.

This year's winner is Telefónica O2 Ireland's Danuta Gray, whose leadership of her team through a period of unprecedented global financial flux has garnered her the top prize.

The GPTW Institute chose this year to launch the award because it wanted to highlight the extraordinary quality of the leadership that is to be found in some of Ireland's top workplaces, according to CEO Bob Lee.

"There's been a lot of talk about the 'leadership deficit' in Irish society. It is real, and it is a problem, but it's not universal. Through our work with a few hundred of Ireland's best employers we see many, many examples of people who are leading their teams through incredible challenges and positioning their businesses for a return to growth, without compromising their core values and beliefs," he says.

"Ireland has many extraordinary leaders who accept the world the way it is and are just quietly getting on with the job that they are there to do. We want to recognise them, and we want to inspire others to commit to high-trust leadership. Trust in an organisation's leadership will ultimately determine failure or success."

"Think of how trust works in personal relationships. Very little of any worth can come of a relationship if there's no

DANUTA GRAY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TELEFÓNICA O2 IRELAND - WINNER

For Danuta Gray, winner of the inaugural GPTW Most Trusted Leader award, trust between all staff members is vital in order to survive in such a fast-paced, competitive sector.

"We have always operated on the basis of being as open and honest with our people as we can," she says. "We've been upfront from the start that change is constant in our industry and that means we have to continuously review the way we do things, both today and in the future."

However, having this trust in place empowers her teams to make decisions that "are right for our business and ultimately our customers".

"We have always been committed to creating a culture that brings out the best in our employees and this is evident in our people managers at all levels in the business. This culture has been in existence from day one when the company formed (as Digifone) and it has evolved over time in line with the needs of the business and our people. In O2, we are always challenging ourselves to be better. We work hard, but we have a lot of fun. We encourage our staff members to take on roles that they enjoy and that bring out the best in them."

In her role as leader, Gray must help her employees understand the bigger picture, she says. "When making changes in your business it is very important to create a picture of the future, so that people can understand the journey to get there."

As well as constant communication, Gray also says that employee engagement is vital. "Keeping all of your people engaged all of the time is, of course, an ongoing challenge, as everyone is different and has different motivations in life. However, we believe the key to unlocking this is to understand our people at an individual level. Here, great leadership at the line-manager stage is absolutely crucial."

So, what advice does she have for people who aspire to be high-trust leaders?

"You have to believe that investing in your people and your culture is the right thing to do. You also have to set out the standards you expect. Having the right leadership team, with a diverse range of skills, experiences and viewpoints is also key. You don't always have to agree with each other, but it is important to spend time listening and understanding and trying to see each person's point of view."

And of course it all comes back to honest communication, she says: "Be a straight talker, listen to your people and act on their feedback, where possible," she says. "Also, involve people in the solution as much as you can. We encourage staff members to offer their thoughts on how we can improve things. This is to ensure O2 becomes an even better place to work."

The winner of the 2010 Award for Ireland's Most Trusted Leader was chosen from a shortlist of candidates selected by the assessment team at Great Place to Work® (GPTW) Institute Ireland. The jury comprised Gary Keegan, director of high-performance management at the Irish Institute of Sport; Paul O'Sullivan, dean of the College of Business at DIT; Tina Roche, chief executive, Business in the Community Ireland; and Joe Webb, chief executive - Ireland, Independent News & Media plc. The jury was chaired by GPTW Institute's CEO, Bob Lee.

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JOHN ATHERTON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, MCDONALD'S IN IRELAND

For John Atherton, trust is the foundation on which his relationships with his colleagues and his team is built. "It's one of the most important things there is. I have to lead by example; I have to be conscious of living the values I espouse. For example, if I get into a lift and choose not to speak to one of my team members, I will be judged by that, and it will have a knock-on effect. I can't say one thing, and do another. It's important that I am approachable and that I walk the walk. In a way, it comes down to small things, but they mean a lot. They build trust."

Atherton says it is vital that a leader doesn't lose this trust during a period of recession, despite the pressures to cut costs. "Businesses taking short-term decisions are really going to suffer once this recession is over," he says. However, he also believes recessions can be periods during which one can "build great trust".

"In order to do that, you have to make sure to stick to what you say you're going to do. This means that if you are implementing, for example, pay freezes, they have to affect everyone, including those at the very top, no exceptions. There's a saying: 'When the tide goes out, you can see who's swimming naked'. In other words, you can see a company for what it is; what its values are. I think that it is very true."

For Atherton, trust is one of the traits that will help McDonald's come through this period of global financial instability. "It's a continuum. People are going to remember the firms that continued to offer good value and service. It's about consistency and predictability."

Ultimately, he believes everyone can be a high-trust leader, as long as the values of the company in general support a high-trust environment. And Atherton feels the attributes of a high-trust leader are quite straightforward: "You need to be transparent with your decision-making and your thoughts. It's all about honest communication, which must be ongoing - and you must let people know what you're doing step by step."

He also believes it is important that staff members feel involved in the decision-making process. "It's definitely the case here at McDonald's that the more we've involved staff in the planning process, the better we've become as a company."

trust. Well, it works in exactly the same way in business. Everything becomes more complicated and moves slower as everyone tries to protect their own position."

Lee points to how every business is simply a series of interconnected one-to-one relationships.

"If there are mainly low-trust relationships throughout an organisation, then the organisation overall will be low-trust, slow moving, and ineffective. But high-trust organisations are fast-moving, adaptive, and highly effective. High trust sets a business free."

So how does a leader influence the levels of trust throughout the organisation?

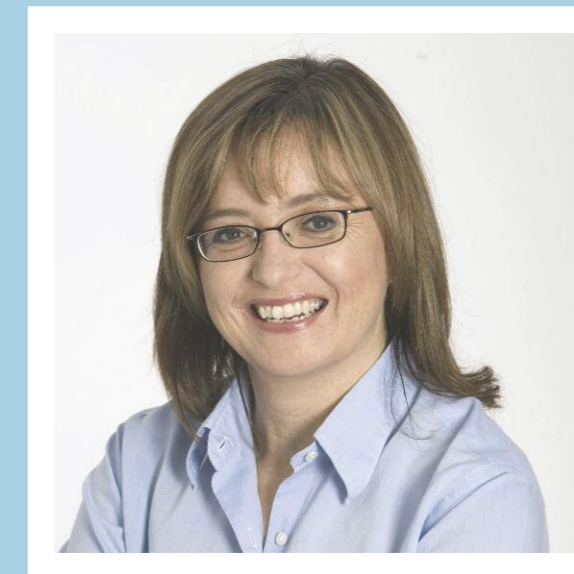
"The leader sets the tone by his or her actions. The organisations on this year's 'Best Workplaces' lists, and in particular the three featured here, would not perform at the level they do were it not for the extraordinary commitment of their leaders, who strive to maintain the trust of their people, even in the most challenging circumstances."

A great leader will have moral courage, says Lee. "They don't turn a blind eye to low trust within their organisation, and they don't abandon their commitment to trust even when - or especially when - it might seem expedient to do so."

Of the winner of the award, Danuta Gray, he says: "She has led O2 through a period of incredible change. Throughout all of this, she and her management team have maintained unwavering commitment to acting in a trustworthy manner."

He believes that leaders such as Gray act as a powerful reminder of the importance of strong leadership.

"This award highlights the pivotal role every business leader plays in determining the level of trust within their organisation. And that level of trust directly determines the business performance of the organisation."



THE MICROSOFT GOVERNANCE TEAM

According to Cathriona Hallahan, managing director of the EMEA Operations Centre and representative of the Governance Team at Microsoft Ireland, trust is embedded in the very fabric of the company.

"Being a great place to work and fostering a culture of trust is one of our core pillars," she says. "In order for us to be successful in our business, we need a team of happy, motivated people who enjoy the work they do. Building and nurturing those relationships is a hugely important commitment for our Governance Team and our managers across the company."

She says Microsoft has been extremely mindful of protecting this basis of trust, particularly during this current recessionary period. "As a Governance Team, we have encouraged our managers to continue to be as open and

honest with their teams over the past 12 months as we were with all employees."

Hallahan says a lot of emphasis was placed on transparent communications. "We engaged our employees through group and one-to-one sessions, as well as through email, about any redundancy programmes we had to put in place. Our communications strategy was key to ensuring that our employees felt supported throughout this challenging time and continue to do so."

Hallahan says trust and employee engagement are crucial to emerging from the recession positively. "At its core our business is all about innovation, and this is a time when innovation will come to the fore. Engaged employees are our business because engaged employees with high levels of trust drive innovation."

Like John Atherton and Danuta Gray, Hallahan believes that anyone who aspires to be can become a high-trust leader. However, she says they need to understand a number of points.

"First of all, they need to understand the importance of high trust in a workplace and then they need to put the right focus on their employees in a consistent and strategic way."

She says a high-trust environment can't be created overnight. "It has to be built into the DNA of the organisation - with trust being central to every aspect of it, including the company's communications, the leaders' actions and the expectations and demands of the employees. It requires consistency in approach and rewards, but it is about much more than just perks. It is critical that leaders earn the trust of their employees and ensure that employees build trust within their teams, amongst their colleagues and with their managers. It has to be valued at all levels of the organisation."