

Tech companies top list of 'great workplaces'

Survey finds trust, respect key to morale

By Laura Petrecca
USA TODAY

Is it the office pizza parties? The on-site child care?

The pay or the perks? The Great Place to Work Institute examines elements that make for a standout workplace and has released its first-ever list of multinational companies most successful at keeping their employees happy.

Tech giant Microsoft, software firm SAS and data management company NetApp took the top three slots, respectively. Google was No. 4 and FedEx No. 5.

Each had individual attributes that made it stand out. For instance, Microsoft's Canadian division gives workers 40 paid hours each year to use on volunteer activities. NetApp Vice Chairman Tom Mendoza calls about 30 employees each week to thank them for their work.

Yet, while those practices can boost morale, much more goes into creating a standout work environment, says Great Place to Work Global CEO José Tolóvi Jr. Exceptional company leaders "think on a higher level," beyond individual workplace perks.

Firms that rank high on the consulting and research group's lists of great employers have three traits in common, he says: employee trust in management, pride in the company and camaraderie with colleagues.

"At the best companies, even the lowest-level employees know they are part of the team," Tolóvi says. "They know that they have a common goal."

Picking winners

To pick the best multinational workplace, the Great Place to Work team evaluated applications from 350 firms that have at least 5,000 employees worldwide and 40% of workers, or 5,000, based outside their home country. The contenders also had to have made at least five of the group's regional "best workplace" lists.

The goal, Tolóvi says, was to

What motivates employees?

Non-financial factors play a vital role in influencing employee motivation and engagement, according to a survey of nearly 30,000 workers in 17 geographic regions. Most workers say being treated with respect is the most important factor, followed by work/life balance, type of work, quality of co-workers and quality of leadership. Pay ranks lower in the list.

Factors	Global ¹	USA	Germany	China	Australia
Being treated with respect	119	123	123	105	125
Work/life balance	111	112	118	98	115
The type of work that you do	110	111	116	102	111
The quality of the people you work with	107	111	124	88	115
The quality of the leadership of the organization	107	112	105	100	117
Base pay	106	108	111	118	111
Working in an environment where you can provide good service to others	104	112	100	91	114
Long-term career potential	92	91	77	103	89
Having flexible working arrangements	91	91	101	77	101
Learning and development opportunities	90	81	84	104	81
Benefits	90	106	88	106	76
Promotion opportunities	89	77	72	104	77
Incentive pay/bonus	84	71	81	104	76

Mercer's survey was conducted between the fourth quarter of 2010 and the second quarter of 2011.
1 - Scores are indexed to 100 based on respondents' relative rankings. The "extremely important" rating could be applied only to their top two choices.

Source: Mercer What's Working survey, 2011

By Kris Kinkade, USA TODAY

pick winners who were able to keep up a "consistency of culture" in various regions. They examined factors such as health benefits, employee turnover and use of flex time.

The Great Place to Work group also wanted to honor companies that maintained employee trust during rough times.

"How do they treat employees when they have to fire them?" Tolóvi says. "Are layoffs done in a respectful manner?"

NetApp passed that test. In 2009, when it cut its global workforce by 5%, leaders sent out e-mails, hosted in-person meetings and distributed a video in which CEO Tom Georgens explained why they had to downsize.

"When you inform employees on what you're doing vs. keeping them in the dark, they can understand why you've made the decisions that you've made," says Rob Salmon, NetApp executive vice president of worldwide field operations.

While management attributes such as great communication skills make a big difference, pay factors in as well.

Employees do "mental arithmetic" on areas such as pay, benefits and company culture to figure out "how much am I put-

ting into this and what am I getting in return?" says Pete Foley, North American employee research leader at consulting firm Mercer. "If pay is way out of line (with industry norms), it can be de-motivating," he says. "But pay really hasn't been a big driver of employee motivation."

A new Mercer global analysis found that non-financial factors usually play a more prominent role in influencing employee motivation and engagement.

Most workers say that being treated with respect is most important, followed by work/life balance, type of work, quality of co-workers and quality of leadership. For U.S. respondents, pay ranks below all of those items.

Firms that don't understand the importance of those hard-to-quantify benefits risk losing the employees they've invested in, Foley says. "That turnover can be very expensive," he says. "You spend time and money bringing someone on board."

Benefits of being first

SAS CEO Jim Goodnight says that one of the best benefits of being known as a Great Place to Work winner is that it helps in retaining employees as well as hiring "the best and the brightest." (SAS was first on the Great

Place to Work U.S. list, which came out earlier this year.)

Shawn Boyer, CEO of job website Snagajob, which earlier this month won the top Great Place to Work slot for small companies, says he pays competitively and gives rewards for those who outperform, but "the real difference-maker is the culture."

That includes serious endeavors such as recruiting people who would work well with other employees, as well as wackier activities such as the annual office Olympics where folks compete in games such as chair soccer.

He warns one-off activities — no matter how great — won't improve a company. Managers need to focus daily on employee satisfaction. "You've got to match up whatever perk you are offering with how you're really living out the culture every day — otherwise it's pretty hollow."



No. 1: Insurance company Acuity, which hosts Urban Cowboy Day for its workers, ranks as the top midsize workplace.

Recent great places to work

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Microsoft (No. 1 on the 2011 multinational list, released Thursday) "You're only as good as your employees," says Microsoft Chief People Officer Lisa Brummel.

The company offers flex time, telecommuting and job sharing.

Local offices can also launch their own endeavors.

For instance, Microsoft Norway hosts a quarterly "junior lunch" where workers on maternity or paternity leave bring their kids into the office for lunch with colleagues.

Job website Snagajob (No. 1 on the 2011 small-business list, released Oct. 18)

CEO Shawn Boyer e-mails an inspirational quote daily, holds a quarterly lunch with 20 staffers and sends a handwritten note — along with a \$100 gift card — to new employees.

He has potential new em-

ployees meet with various Snagajob staffers, so they can weed out those who aren't team players.

"Some (candidates) will kiss up to the person who they think they'll be reporting to and will act differently to someone who they don't think will matter," he says.

Insurance provider Acuity (No. 1 on midsize business list, also released Oct. 18)

CEO Ben Salzmann has hosted circus-themed meetings, a companywide chocolate-tasting party and an employee mechanical-bull-riding event.

He's put a priority on open employee communications, invites staffers into board meetings and provides affordable health benefits. (He hasn't raised employee health insurance rates in 11 years.)

"Gimmicks are important," but only as part of a culture where employees feel valued, he says. "We want everyone to cross the finish line together."

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