

As We Live And Work
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The Gold Medal

What attributes must a company have to earn a gold medal for Best Place to Work? Our experience indicates three interdependent factors contribute to the strong working alliance necessary to make a company “the best”: the individual, the team, and the company.

It starts with the individual. Each person has to feel good about the work they do. People thrive on competency and pride. They have to sense they’re slotted into the right job – one that presents an opportunity for challenge and growth. And they have to experience direct rewards, financially and emotionally, along with timely, constructive feedback. A hospital worker remarked to us: “I have worked here for many years and I am still amazed by the extraordinary commitment, compassion and care that each person brings. I am proud that what we do has a clear value to comfort those in need. I get to walk through the same doors that a miracle walks through every day”.

Most individuals don't work in a vacuum. They work in teams. A number of years ago, a book was published entitled 10,000 Working Days . It referred to a 40 year career at 250 working days per year. It made a powerful point. When asked what they liked best about their company, the people interviewed for the book replied "the ability to schmooze": to spontaneously meet in the hall, at lunch, or in their offices to share stories with their co-workers about their work, family, and individual interests. One respondent said, "In that informal atmosphere, valuable thoughts emerged that never would have been addressed." This is what Yahoo's CEO, Marissa Mayer, is striving for: the creation of a culture where impromptu hallway conversations and face-to-face interactions propagate energy, ideas, and innovation. Yahoo's EVP of People and Development, Jackie Reses, explains that "to become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will need to be important, so we need to be working side-by-side." And we would add that the best companies achieve a balance between face time and flex time.

The individual and the team intersect in "the company". A "best" company has the responsibility to clearly articulate its goals, provide a safe environment for its people, hire the best talent, provide the best resources and benefits they can afford, be financially prudent, and take appropriate risks. In the "best" companies, communication from the top is authentic and, if necessary, discrete. Strong companies handle success and disappointment well. They don't look to blame, they look for solutions. The

spontaneous rewards they provide to show appreciation have enormous benefits. Random pizza lunches go a long way during a stressful period, while obligatory celebrations work just the opposite: they are perceived as phony and reduce morale. And while there are limits to encroaching on workers' personal lives, discrete helpful interventions can go a long way.

These are uncertain times with enormous expectations. Yet, this is the moment for a company to shine. The individual, the team, and the company each have a responsibility to achieve a "Best" rating: to give and take, to be nimble and flexible, and to be an ambassador to their customers and community. That's a powerful marketing tool that sends a great message and ignites the company's internal and external stakeholders.

The best place to work starts with an individual, and ends with an individual. Novelist Barbara Kingsolver neatly sums this up: *I do my best work if I think about what I have to offer.*

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