

Becoming an Employer of Choice

Studies have consistently found that, as an employer of choice, you will enjoy better financial results, a bigger pool of job candidates, and higher level of employee engagement. However, being an employer of choice is more than just providing free meals, on-site massage, concierge service, or “bring your pet to work” days. These perks help, of course. More importantly, being an employer of choice means you build a unique **organization culture** that attracts the right employees. It means that these employees are dedicated to working for you and will go the extra mile to help your organization succeed. It means that employees choose to stay with you even when your competitors try to recruit them.

At an employer of choice, senior management inspires employees with a clear vision. They work hard to communicate effectively with employees and build trust with employees by delivering on their promises. An employer of choice rewards employees for their performance, provides employees with plenty of developmental and career advancement opportunities, and have systems and practices in place that enable employees to do their best work.

Becoming an employer of choice is not easy, but it is doable. The following tips can get you on your way to becoming an attractive employer.

Clearly articulate your company vision to all employees. A picture is worth a thousand words, that’s what having a clear company vision will do for your employees—it paints a clear picture of your company’s future success. As a leader, communicating the vision throughout your company is essential to moving your company forward.

When a leader communicates a new vision, people may not hear it the first time around. You need to give employees opportunities to separate the key message from the noise of change. You can use multiple channels of communications to reinforce your company vision and direction. You can also create short video clips and post stories about your company vision on your intranet and company website. Doing so will allow your employees to access your message 24/7. Employees want to know where your company is headed, clearly articulating your vision and company direction is a way to help employees see their future with your company.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.

An employer of choice makes sure that its employees have access to information about its mission, vision, business goals and strategies; its products and services; and its operation procedures and processes. At an employer of choice, communication is a two-way process where employees are encouraged to voice their opinions and concerns and where leaders are available to answer employee questions.

Provide opportunities for training and development.

An employer of choice invests in their employees and provides time for employees to attend training, seminars, or conferences. Many employers of choice also provide tuition reimbursement as a benefit to their employees. As a leader, you can help employees grow by identifying employees' training needs (e.g., formal training, learning about new products/services) and removing barriers to employee training (e.g., work schedules, workloads).

Provide career advancement opportunities. An employer of choice promotes from within and provides coaching to help employees develop. At an employer of choice, leaders coach employees for better performance, provide timely positive feedback as well as point out opportunities for improvement. An employer of choice recognizes employees' contributions and celebrates success when key milestones are achieved. For example, at Federal Express (No. 97 on the 2008 *Fortune's* 100 Best Companies list), 90% of its managers moved up the rank over the years.

Align HR practices with business strategies. An employer of choice designs its HR practices and tailors its total compensation package to attract and retain top talent. At an employer of choice, its employees are more likely to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. In addition, an employer of choice conducts regular performance reviews and rewards employees based on the merits of their work. For example, many employers of choice offer variable pay to attract and retain high performers.

An employer of choice also meets the challenges of changing demographics and family structures by offering flexible work schedules, telecommuting, or job sharing to enable its employees to find work/life balance. Some employers of choice also offer on-site childcare, adoption aid, or dependent care savings accounts to help parents balance the demands of work and parenting.

Communication Practices at Best Companies

Employees at Rackspace Managed Hosting, No. 32 on the *Fortune* 2008 "100 Best Companies to Work for" list, can attend bimonthly Open Book meeting where all financial issues are openly discussed.

The CEO of Adobe Systems (No. 40) answers emails within 24 hours, and Yahoo! (No. 87) CEO Jerry Young hosts monthly Chat'n Chow lunches and answers employee questions online.

Quick Assessment

Now it is your turn to assess where your company is on the journey to becoming an employer of choice. The following questions will help you identify where gaps exist and highlight areas where you can take action.

Company Mission and Vision

- Do you have a clear company vision and mission statement?
- Is your company's vision and mission statement understood by your employees?

Communications

- Do your leaders visit employees on the floor, at branches, or in the field?
- Do they listen to employee input and follow up with action even when immediate changes cannot be made?
- Do your leaders respond to employee requests in a timely manner?
- Do you conduct regular employee survey to assess employee engagement and their satisfaction with working at your company?
- Can your employees easily access information about your company products, services, HR policies, and operation procedures?

Training and Development

- Do you have a formal training and development program?
- On average, how many hours of training per year does each employee receive?
- Does your new-hire training program equip new hires with the necessary skills and resources to do their jobs well?
- Do you solicit employee and management feedback on what works well and what needs to improve in employee training?

Career Advancement Opportunities

- Do managers and supervisors know how to give effective feedback and coach employees?
- Are your managers and supervisors rewarded for growing talent?
- Do you have an internal job bank where employees who are qualified can apply for jobs?

Performance Management and Aligned HR Practices

- Do you have a formal performance management program?
- Are managers held accountable for reviewing employee performance on a regular basis?
- Do you offer flexible work arrangements and benefits that meet your employees' diverse needs?

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