



md News

Medical Design

The Best Places to Work

**What makes one company better to work for than others?
Here's a peek at what keeps employees happy.**

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Look at any list of the top companies to work at and a few trends jump out. The companies are usually small to medium size, offer employees creative freedom, and think of employees as valuable assets instead of overhead. Take Google for instance. It is number one in *Fortune* magazine's recent ranking of the 100 Best Companies to Work For. Founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page wanted to recreate a college atmosphere and then some when they started Google. So employees are treated to free food from 11 gourmet cafeterias and snacks bars. Google also has pool tables and an in-house gym for the late nights employees routinely put in. There are free bus rides to work from stops in the Bay Area, and free car washes and oil changes for employees who drive.

Yet even for more traditional companies who are not in the somewhat fantasy-world of Silicon Valley, there are programs that keep employees happy and satisfied. Some of the programs include perks like tuition reimbursement, or flex time. Many companies have less tangible benefits such as those that encourage diversity.

A career track for engineers

Baxa Corp., Englewood, Colo., (baxa.com) was recently named one of the best places to work in Colorado. One thing that sets them apart is their formal career ladder or career-growth program. "Many of our engineers and technical people felt that the only way to advance in the company was to move up to management," says Baxa vice president of Organizational Development Laurel Ditson. "These engineers weren't interested in a full management role with the paper work and performance reviews that come with it." So Baxa started the career ladder, which has levels from one to six. "Level one and two employees are working on project tasks and still learning," says Ditson. At levels three and four, engineers learn how their projects fit into the company's business plan and are encouraged to propose new solutions to problems. "By the time an engineer reaches level six they are influencing company strategy, making proposals to senior management, and are regarded as experts in the field," Ditson adds.

The career-track program was developed with the help of engineers, who then had to classify themselves. "We broke each level into eight core areas and then generated requirements for each. The categories include different levels of supervision, degrees of work complexity, leadership skills needed, and influence. The track lists well defined goals for employees who want to move up in the company and for those at higher levels who are responsible for promoting engineers," says Ditson.

Other characteristics that set Baxa apart as a great place to work are its tuition-reimbursement plan, on-site exercise room, and one day of paid time to volunteer. In fact over 100 employees and their families recently participated in a 5K race for a local charity.

The Fun Squad

HR execs at **Hospira Inc.**, Lake Forest, Ill., (hospira.com) keep employees happy by putting on educational programs such as the Leadership Academy. These are one-week

An example of a few requirements for Level 1 and 6 positions shows Baxa employees exactly what skills they need to reach these levels. The company rolled out the ladder program specifically for its technical staff.

HOW THE CAREER LADDER STACKS UP

Level	Level 1	Level 6
Education experience	Typically requires a 4-year degree and minimal previous experience.	Typically requires a graduate degree along with broad industry experience.
Knowledge	Has some knowledge of the fundamental concepts, practices, and procedures in the field.	Widely recognized as an industry expert and provides technical leadership in the company.
Supervision	Works under direct supervision on assigned tasks.	Works under consultative direction towards corporate goals.
Focuses on	Project tasks	Strategic plans
Complexity level	Performs routine engineering work requiring application of standard practices to assignments of limited scope and complexity.	Develops solutions for unprecedented, mission-critical issues.
Leadership	Coordinates work with others.	Provides leadership in the development of technical strategy and participates in developing business strategy.
Communications and influence	Communicates task status to manager in a timely manner.	Highly skilled in preparing and presenting complex, potentially controversial cases.
Performance factors	Technical skills	Collaborative and business skills

training sessions for either entry-level managers or developing leaders who have some experience. Hospira's corporate vice president of Global Human Resources Henry Weishaar says he is the only HR exec he knows with a Fun Squad. "The group is made of employees from all divisions who get together to plan events such as a Founders Day celebration and fitness challenges. Recently we held a competition in honor of the World Cup and the winning employees got to travel to other Hospira locations around the world. One employee from Italy came to the U.S. and one employee from the U.S. will visit Amsterdam," he says.

Hospira also takes pride in the diversity of its approximately 15,000 employees and makes an effort to recruit all kinds of people. "One women's club within the company regularly brings in speakers, and there is an active gay/lesbian group," says Weishaar. Hospira has been honored by the Human Rights Campaign, a lesbian, gay, transsexual advocacy group, as one of 2007's best places to work.

Hospira also offers neat perks such as on-site dry cleaning, car washes, oil changes, and cafeterias that run on the honor system. They also have a tuition-reimbursement plan and offer seminars on how to handle fiscal responsibilities. To judge employee happiness, the company runs what they call skip-level meetings where an employee meets with someone who is two or more levels above or below their status. "These meetings reveal things that don't come up when you're talking to your direct supervisor," says Weishaar.

Employees have to trust their boss

A recent study revealed that an employee's longevity with a company directly correlates with how much they trust management. About 32% of a worker's desire to stay or go depends on whether or not they trust their boss.

"Trust is much more than a nice buzzword," says Mark Murphy, Leadership IQ CEO. "The extent to which an employee trusts their immediate superior directly relates to their desire to spend their

career with a company."

The survey of 7,209 executives, managers, and employees shows that many employees don't trust their own top management. **Leadership IQ**, (leadershipiq.com) which conducts leadership training for corporations, ran the survey to assess the overall levels of trust in organizations. Only 20% of people strongly trust their top management. Some 36% moderately trust their executives, while the remaining 44% range from not trusting to strongly distrusting.

The study further discovered that people trust their direct boss more than top management. About 34% of people strongly trust their direct boss. Another 35% trust moderately, while the rest either don't trust or strongly distrust their direct boss. ■

