



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GREAT PLACE TO WORK?

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Creating and sustaining a great place to work

1. If you claim that trust, teamwork etc. are important attributes of your work, how frequently do you take the time to assess them at all, let alone measure them objectively? Where possible measure and then track how you're doing on key attributes mentioned previously.
2. One of the important decision making circuits of the brain is the reward centre. Therefore it's no surprise that people respond so very well to receiving rewards. They're especially motivating if they're unexpected – even if they're not particularly large. Reflect on how often you give or receive rewards and try and deploy them more often.
3. If you're hoping to sustain a good place to work you'll need to be consistent. One incident of 'bad behaviour' that shows bad faith can set back or even destroy months of good work. That being said, if you've got 'goodwill points' in the bank, a recovery is far more likely – though it will take time. You can also expect people to be a little wary, for a while at least.

The BRW 50 Best Places to Work 2012

Hearty congratulations to every one of the 50 companies that made it onto the BRW 50 Best Places to work honours list. A number, we know, are subscribers to UGM's regular briefings and we are so pleased to learn of their success. Well done!

A closer look at the list shows that the IT sector can again be well pleased with this year's results. Of the 50 companies to share the honours, 20 hail from this sector. In fact, there are only 3 non-IT companies in the Top 10 Best Places To Work in 2012, coming in at 7th, 9th and 10th place. This good performance isn't a once-off either. Australian IT businesses have fared well over the past few years at least.

Another common feature of the Top 50 is that most of the companies are around the 200 people mark or smaller. Actually, 68% of the list had fewer than 200 employees. Quite a few number around 50 people.

In contrast, the lack of Australia's big business icons in the list is striking. Only one company (Ernst & Young) in the Top 50 has over 1000 employees. BRW's Ben Woodhead compared the Australian context with the Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For. More than a third of the Fortune 100 Best Companies have more than 10,000 people. Four companies on the list have over 100,000 staff.

Sustained high performance

Another interesting feature of the Top 50 list is the number of organisations that win a place on the list year after year. A key reason may be the judging criteria. Entrants definitely can't just dust off the previous year's application and resubmit, hoping for better luck! Also, they need to deliver.

Two-thirds of a company's score is derived directly from employee assessment of their workplace. Through a series of questions, they rate trust, pride and camaraderie at work. The remaining third of the total comes from a culture audit that management completes. The audit requires companies to demonstrate how they're creating and sustaining great places to work. This approach to evaluation means the public can be pretty sure that these truly are great places to work! It's not just a glossy application and PR spin that wins this award.

This year's winner, Melbourne's OBS, has earned a place in the Top 10 since 2009. In 2011, they were placed 7th. Managing Director, Andy Neumann, highlights that being a great place to work requires consistent effort. And there's no doubt about that. Remember, the Top 50 must have high trust, pride and camaraderie scores. Anyone working in an organisation knows that these take time to establish and require consistent effort to sustain. High scores dissipate quickly if company climate deteriorates.

How many workplaces have what it takes?

Maybe that's a key reason why only 291 Australian companies entered in the first place? This relatively small turn-out despite many Australian workplaces proclaiming people as their most important asset and listing the likes of trust, teamwork and respect among their values.

Rather than diminishing the value of the winners' achievements, the low number of entrants serves to raise them up even further. Even those that didn't feature showed courage and a willingness to step up to the plate and have their claims of being a good employer judged. No wonder these companies have so many enthusiastic applicants for any available position. The level of entries raises a further question, "How many Australian companies could compete, let alone make the list?"

What is the secret to success?

First, let's acknowledge that the only way a company will make it to the Best Place To Work list is through its people. Influence's 'Law of Reciprocity' suggests that a good rating is a payback for 'good things' the company has delivered. Chances are many of these folk are making contributions that are being valued. The companies variously mention a range of rewards on offer to their people. These include time off, dinner with senior management and, in the case of OBS, free beer and fresh fruit.

Second, since the key attributes are trust, camaraderie and pride, it is likely that size is a factor. According to evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar, people have the brain capacity to sustain social circles that include around 150 people. Key considerations in this determination are trust and obligation. But, what about the high numbers in the many large Fortune 100 Best Place to Work For companies? It's highly likely they foster good social relations within reasonably sized sub-divisions, where people genuinely feel (and experience) they are not just a number.

Third, a very high proportion of the BRW Top 50 Best Place to Work companies mention generous (and some quite amazing) levels of training available for individuals. These companies are likely to enjoy the obvious benefits in terms of increased engagement and raised skill levels. Additionally, research has shown that companies that spend generously on training outperformed matched companies where training spending was lower.

What can you do?

Even if you're not in a position to enter your organisation into the 2013 competition, you may like to regularly monitor trust, camaraderie and pride in your team, division or organisation.