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Page 72

Human Resources

Becoming an Employer of Choice

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An employer of choice is an organization that employees choose to work for when presented with other employment options. This choice is a conscious decision to join or to stay with an organization.

Today, employees have choices more so than ever before. These choices include occupation, employer location, industry and work arrangements. In this market, employees make clear decisions about where they work, why and for how long. While employees establish their own personal decision-making criteria, there are some common issues that influence everyone's choices. The more employers understand about these choice issues, the more they can take steps to strengthen their positions as employers of choice.

At the American Public Power Association's 2005 national conference, James Welsh, president and general manager of Kissimmee Utility Authority in Florida, prepared and delivered a presentation titled, *Appreciation and Respect, Policies and Attitudes that Enable our Organizations to be the Employers of Choice in our Communities*. A great place to work will attract skilled and talented people to an organization, Welsh said. "It's especially important in a capital-intensive industry, such as the electric industry," he said. "You will eventually employ the cream of the crop if you spend the necessary time and energy to scan the larger pool of applicants seeking employment. This process will make your organization an even better place to work. This will also build a well-deserved reputation as one of the top companies to work for."

In an article "Becoming an Employer of Choice," Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia examined eight principal factors considered by most employees:

The company—In their research, Herman and Gioia found that employees want to know whether the company is sound and reputable, if the company is stable and provides a valuable service or product to society. "Is the company socially conscious and environmentally sensitive?"

The culture—People want to work for an organization with high values and standards. They want a culture of inclusion and a sense of the community.

Enlightened leadership—Even though the most influential relationship in any organization is usually between the employee and the employee's immediate supervisor, people want to be well-led from the top of the organization. They expect leaders to think and operate strategically, always looking to the future. Leaders are visible, accessible and willing to embrace change.

Care of people—Balancing work and life is increasingly important to employees in today's active world. Employees today expect a home-like, safe and healthy environment. People want good working conditions, flexibility and lots of recognition. They want their families involved and they want to know what's going on. A good internal communications system is a common characteristic of employers of choice.

Growth and opportunity—Growth (personal and professional) is a strong motivator, as employees concentrate on their future marketability. Whether they stay with one employer or not, people want to choose their own circumstances. Staying current makes the choice possible. Supervisors become advocates for employee growth, encouraging people to take training and gain new experiences.

Meaningful work—Employees want meaningful work. They want jobs that make a difference, either for the public, customers or internal customers. Employees want to see the value of their work. "They want to reach their full potential, expanding and enriching their jobs, enjoying stimulating opportunities," Gioia said. Employees like to be involved in the design of their work so they feel a part of what's happening.

Compensation and benefits—Employees are concerned about competitive pay, but they are also looking for choices such as profit-sharing, stock options, 401k match, domestic partner benefits, direct deposit of paychecks, comprehensive insurance coverage, wellness programs, adoption coverage, time off and child care. Some are even asking for pet care benefits.

Making a difference—Social values are important. Employees want to know if companies lend their support to United Way, community theatre, Habitat for Humanity, youth programs, and clean-up/fix-up projects.

Some of the advantages to becoming an employer of choice include:

- Ease in attracting quality talent.
- Tendency for higher retention rates for current employees.
- Maintenance of employee motivation because of shared pride and vision.

Characteristics of an employer of choice include:

- CEO is highly visible and has positive name recognition.
- Job advertisements bring a large volume of responses, including unsolicited resumes.
- The company's name is among the most recognized in the industry.
- The company's product is widely recognized in the industry.
- Employees speak highly of the company.

The Herman Group predicts businesses will be challenged like never before as young people finish their formal schooling and enter the work force. "They are a whole generation of ADD," Gioia said. "They've been on computers and video games their whole lives and used to things changing every nanosecond. We've got to find a way to engage them."

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