

Producing Desired Results

THROUGH CHANGE

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Becoming an Employer of Choice

by Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia

Competition for good workers is heating up. Employers are waving their arms—and flags—and saying, “look at me!” In a high stakes game that resembles kids choosing players for a softball game at school, they cry, “Pick me! Pick me!”

The war for top talent has become fierce. As the need for well-qualified, high-performing employees intensifies, employers vie to position themselves as the right place for the kind of people they want. They strive to become known as an Employer of Choice.

The descriptive phrase, employer of choice, is rapidly becoming more than just a buzzword; it is representative of a whole new design of corporate culture. With continued rapid change and tight labor markets, employers will be continually challenged to locate, attract, optimize, and retain the talent needed to serve their customers. They must, as a matter of survival, earn the right to be selected by top talent. Well-qualified workers have lots of choices. As they contemplate offers that are continually dangled in front of them, they are much more discerning than most employers give them credit for. Hungry employers wave fistfuls of cash in their faces, and the top applicants turn up their noses. They want more than just a lot of cash. Attracting and holding people today is a bigger issue than just money.

The Criteria

Our research in preparation of writing *How to Become an Employer of Choice* produced a list of eight principal factors considered by most workers. They are:

1. The Company. Does the company have a solid history and a good reputation? Is it stable? Is the company respected in its industry as well as in the community? Are the products and services worthy—do they have a positive value for society? Are they produced well and is quality valued? Is the company socially conscious and environmentally sensitive?

2. The Culture. People want to work for a company with high values and standards. They want a culture of inclusion and a sense of community. Today’s workers are not interested in status barriers. Traditions, rituals, and history are important as threads that weave together the community.

3. Enlightened Leadership. Even though the most influential relationship in any company is usually between the worker and the worker’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. Senior executives in Employer of ChoiceSM companies emphasize the strategic value of people. Leaders are visible and accessible, reaching out to others. They embrace change, making continual change and improvement comfortable for all.

4. Care of People. Quality of life issues are increasingly important to workers in today’s fast-paced, active world. A home-like, safe, and healthy environment is expected today. 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 ChoiceSM.

5. Growth and Opportunity. Personal and professional growth are strong motivators today, 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 that choice possible. Supervisors become advocates for employee growth, encouraging people to take training, gain new experiences, and participate in the company’s mentoring program. Fast-track opportunities abound.

6. Meaningful work. People want to do something meaningful in their work today; “just a job” doesn’t feel right. 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 stretch to reach their full potential, expanding and enriching their jobs, enjoying stimulating opportunities. Employees like to be involved in the design of their work so they feel a part of what’s happening.

7. Compensation and Benefits. Today’s workers are concerned about competitive pay, but they’re also looking for profit sharing, stock options, domestic partner benefits, direct deposit of paychecks, diverse insurance coverages, wellness programs, adoption coverage, time off, discount pricing, and childcare. Some are even asking for petcare benefits. It’s the total package that counts.

8. Making a Difference. Social values are increasingly important. What are we doing to improve the world around us? Savvy employers are involved in their local communities and in broader interests that serve Mankind. They lend their support—financial, in-kind, and human—to United Way, community theatre, Habitat for Humanity, youth programs, and clean-up/fix-up projects.

Employers eager to attract and hold top talent will become much more responsive to what people are looking for. The corporate design and approach will change with the times, creating new relationships between workers and their employers.

*Roger Herman, CMC, FIMC and Joyce Gioia, CMC futurists and management consultants are co-authors of *How to Become an Employer of Choice* (Oakhill Press, May 2000). For information about a recognition program that designates companies as Employer of Choice (SM), visit www.employerofchoice.net. You can reach the authors at www.hermangroup.com or by calling (800) 227-3566.*