

Special Issue: The Top Places to Work in PR

This issue, the culmination of *PR News*' first-ever celebration of The Top Places to Work in PR, profiles the agencies, corporate communications departments and nonprofits that go above and beyond, matching their superb client work with outstanding internal efforts to support employees' personal growth and success.

These winners were selected from hundreds of submissions, judged by *PR News* editors, as well as by an outside panel of communications experts who work in academia. These top 10 agencies and corporate departments, and five nonprofits, demonstrated commitment to cultivating dynamic internal cultures in which employees are driven to excel.

From offering nontraditional benefits like on-site restaurants and massages to giving employees the opportunity to work in offices abroad, each of these organizations has shown a unique interest in the happiness and well being of its staff, clearly understanding that excellence comes from within.

PR News will celebrate these winners at its Platinum PR Awards luncheon in New York on Oct. 21, where it will also announce the selection of its "Best in Class," naming one company from each of the three categories to receive this top honor. To find out who made Best in Class, check out prnewsonline.com on or after Oct. 21.

► CORPORATE

BOEHRINGER INGELHEIM PHARMACEUTICAL



This pharma company gets rave reviews from employees for its "inclusive" and "non-bureaucratic" culture in which hierarchies do not apply. Best of all, it's a place where communications execs get respect from senior managers, who turn to them for counseling on a regular basis.

"It is the best experience I have had with a senior management team that utilizes PR as a strategic tool to drive business results," says one

employee. "There is respect for everyone on the team and the value they bring to the company."

The family-owned company also understands the importance of work-life balance, easing everyday stresses with on-site benefits like childcare and a fitness center. "Our family values come through in everything we do," a staffer says.

One final note from an enthusiastic Boehringer employee: "I have worked in a corporate environment for almost 20 years. This is by far the most constructive environment I've worked in as a communicator. Our CEO really gets it." PRN

► AGENCY

APCO WORLDWIDE

Since its inception in 1984, APCO Worldwide has been an advocate of corporate philanthropy, and these tenets remain central to the company's culture. In this vein, the agency created the APCO Gives Back program, encouraging employees to volunteer with a charity of their choice.

As a certified majority woman-owned business, APCO also places importance on growing a diverse workforce. To support more women in PR, execs created a scholarship for female students at American University. Most recently, the firm partnered with the LaGrant Foundation, donating \$10,000 for minority students majoring in PR.



A team from APCO's Washington, D.C., office volunteering at a local community center on September 11, the National Day of Service and Remembrance.

Staffers note that despite its growth, the firm has always stayed true to its founding values. "Our ethos of inclusion, collegiality and entrepreneurial spirit has remained consistent," says one employee. "We are empowered to perform our work in a way that is meaningful to us, which is very satisfying." PRN

► NONPROFIT

AMERICAN RED CROSS

The American Red Cross team operates under the "Change your career ... Change the world" mantra, and its national operations are guided by the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, resulting in a workforce whose "diversity is reflective of the community," says one employee. "The American Red Cross is like family."

As such, the nonprofit operates with "an open-door policy from the CEO on down," with employees moving freely between functions. "The possibilities are wide open," a staffer says. "Good ideas are welcomed, challenged and—if solid—imple-



mented." It's a wise approach given the nonprofit's growing spectrum of missions, which range from disaster response to humanitarian aid. But this doesn't preclude execs from encouraging employees to pursue their own philanthropic interests. Says one employee, "We also volunteer during disasters as non-paid staff and volunteer for organizations outside of Red Cross." PRN

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CORPORATE BEST BUY

This one-stop shop for electronics, software and more is also a place that's known for its "fun," "creative," "diversified" and "open" work environment. In fact, its communications department has been on the forefront of adopting digital solutions that connect the 155,000 employees scattered throughout the company.

Specifically, the company's internal social network, Blue Shirt Nation, was launched by two corporate marketers in 2006 to fuel collaboration among employees. Now, the number of active users has surpassed the 25,000 mark and includes everyone from senior executives to store clerks. The network is used as a forum for voicing opinions and changing ideas. It has also been credited with increasing participation in

Best Buy's 401(k) plan and reducing turnover.

This method of connecting employees and empowering them to effect change within the organization is a telltale sign of Best Buy's commitment to cultivating an open environment that "fights bureaucracy every day."

"Titles are not an issue," says one employee. "Whether it's an executive vice president or a coordinator, we have access to everyone."

This, coupled with an employee discount program and stock options, makes for a dedicated, happy staff. Plus, the company is serious about the advancement of women through WOLF, a network of thousands of employees who work with individuals, brands and communities to build strong women leaders. **PRN**

CORPORATE CHESAPEAKE ENERGY CORPORATION

This company is the top producer of natural gas in the United States, and employees are the first to tell you why: "Our employees work harder and faster than our competitors. They aren't caught up in bureaucracy that exists in peer organizations."

The latter is one of the official "Distinguishing Characteristics of Chesapeake," which also include a strong work ethic, a culture of ownership, innovation, focus on the details and knowing how to have fun. And who wouldn't have fun in a work environment that includes some of the best on-site amenities around? These include a 70,000 square-foot fitness center, tanning and massages, and four restaurants (jealous yet?). If those incentives aren't enough, then consider this: In 2008, 23% of the company's employees received promotions, with

average salary increases of 13.4%.

In addition to being growth-oriented, Chesapeake's leadership is dedicated to fostering an open, collaborative and communicative environment. CEO Aubrey McClendon "stresses an open-door policy," says an employee, pointing to the "Ask Aubrey" Q&A forum on the company intranet and the bimonthly town hall meetings with senior leadership, which have "at least one hour dedicated to employee Q&A."

A high level of employee morale is evidenced by the fact that 48% of all new hires come through employee referrals. "Our distinctive culture draws bright, talented people who want to work at Chesapeake," one staffer says. "We know how to celebrate and have fun." **PRN**

CORPORATE CISCO

Cisco's leadership team is all about cultivating diverse skill sets among employees, and cross-collaboration between departments is strongly encouraged. "We take pride in understanding the many facets of Cisco's business," say one employee. "Sixty-three percent of employees' time is spent communicating and collaborating."

In the same vein, here are a few other compelling statistics:

- 56% of employees' work is accomplished away from their desks;
- 35% of collaborative work is done virtually;
- 40% of Cisco employees report to a manager located in another city; and,

- 85% telecommute at least part of the week.

One of Cisco's most distinguishing characteristics is its diversity. According to an employee, "Diversity, the collective mix of who we are as individuals, is central to Cisco's culture and way of doing business. Cisco actively seeks to hire people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, skills and points of view."

The company also supports diversity in other ways, offering tax true-ups for gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered (GLBT) employee dependents, and founding a Diversity Council in 2007 "to integrate inclusion and diversity into our business processes and operations at all levels." **PRN**

► CORPORATE DISCOVERY COMMUNICATIONS

“Discovery is committed to creating a culture that supports employee development and learning,” says one Discovery employee. “It views employees as valued contributors, seeking broad input into strategic planning and decision-making on all levels, and providing ongoing opportunities for growth and development through mentoring and education.”

This summarizes Discovery’s “stimulating” and “exciting” work environment, which “challenges, rewards and encourages professional growth and career development.” The company’s performance-driven culture is underscored by its annual incentive compensation plan, as well as the annual pay analysis reports that are conducted to

identify competitive rates in the marketplace and to determine the competitiveness of the existing salary structure.

There is also a big focus on diversifying the opportunities available to employees. Discovery’s MentorNet program matches protégés with mentors in different divisions, and employees are given the chance to work across departments through job rotations and taskforces. The company also offers tuition reimbursement and specialized training courses that are customized according to employees’ interests and career paths.

These benefits all play a role in making Discovery a company where, according to an employee survey, 95% of employees are proud to work. **PRN**

► CORPORATE FIRST HORIZON NATIONAL CORP.



The PR team at First Horizon National Corp.

First Horizon National Corp. is consistently recognized as one of the country’s best employers by the likes of *Working Mother* and *Fortune* magazines, and for good reason, especially in the context of corporate communications: These executives have “a real seat at the table,” says one staffer, who notes that the communications department reports directly to the CEO and is part of his executive management team. “We aggressively manage our corporate reputation and are given the support to do that from throughout the company.”

This reputation is aligned with the corporate culture, which “is so strong and positive, we’ve given it a name: Firstpower,” a staffer says. “It’s focused

on engaging employees so they make our customers—and therefore our shareholders—happy to do business with us.”

Indeed, customers are happy to do business with First Horizon because the employees are happy to be working there, which can be attributed to the company’s serious focus on work-life balance. In 2008, 40% of employees reported working some type of flexible schedule to help balance their personal and professional responsibilities, and 90% said their managers were supportive of this.

Ultimately, says one enthusiastic employee, “If you don’t know about First Horizon yet, you should. This company rocks.” **PRN**

► CORPORATE PFIZER

Pfizer’s corporate media relations department is “a global organization spanning more than 20 countries,” says one employee. “The global nature of this 24/7 operation offers opportunities for promotional growth within our team and throughout the larger corporation.”

The availability of this internal growth has also been facilitated by the communications overhaul that Pfizer completed over the course of the last two years. This, plus the “open-space office environment,” brought the team closer together and enhanced employees’ ability to innovate and collaborate on a much higher level. But that wasn’t just a by-product of the larger communications transformation. Says one employee, “The space involved everyone voluntarily giving up their

private offices with doors, and the leader exiting his corner office. The leadership and the full team now sit side-by-side.”

Thus, employees feel a strong sense of camaraderie. “The self-monitoring nature of the team promotes mutual respect, understanding and flexibility,” says a staffer. “Team members are accountable for themselves, the team, their internal clients and the media they serve.”

Employees are also encouraged to branch out from their traditional roles and take on new projects. Recent examples include a program that gives uninsured Americans free access to medicines, as well as Pfizer’s recent entrée into Twitter, both of which “have been widely viewed as a surprise for a biopharma company culture.” **PRN**

PR NEWS’ 2009 TOP PLACES TO WORK IN PR

All winners are listed in alphabetical order and include the companies’ HQ locations.

CORPORATE:

1. Best Buy—*Richfield, MN* (p. 2)
2. Boehringer Ingelheim—*Ridgefield, CT* (p. 1)
3. Chesapeake Energy Corp.—*Oklahoma City, OK* (p. 2)
4. Cisco—*San Jose, CA* (p. 2)
5. Discovery Comms—*Silver Spring, MD* (p. 3)
6. First Horizon—*Memphis, TN* (p. 3)
7. Pfizer—*New York, NY* (p. 3)
8. State Farm Insurance—*Bloomington, IL* (p. 4)
9. Symantec—*Cupertino, CA* (p. 4)
10. Turner Broadcasting—*Atlanta, GA* (p. 4)

AGENCY:

1. APCO Worldwide—*Washington, DC* (p. 1)
2. Carmichael Lynch Spong—*Minneapolis, MN* (p. 5)
3. CJP Communications—*New York, NY* (p. 5)
4. Cohn Marketing—*Denver, CO* (p. 5)
5. Marina Maher Communications—*NY, NY* (p. 6)
6. MWW Group—*East Rutherford, NJ* (p. 6)
7. Sterling Comms—*San Francisco, CA* (p. 6)
8. Text 100—*New York, NY* (p. 7)
9. Waggener Edstrom—*Seattle, WA* (p. 7)
10. Weber Shandwick—*New York, NY* (p. 7)

NONPROFIT:

1. American Red Cross—*Washington, DC* (p. 1)
2. Children’s Home Society of Florida—*Winter Park, FL* (p. 8)
3. Cleveland Metropolitan School District—*Cleveland, OH* (p. 8)
4. Georgia Tech Research Institute—*Atlanta, GA* (p. 8)
5. Kaiser Permanente—*Oakland, CA* (p. 8)

► CORPORATE STATE FARM INSURANCE

State Farm Insurance's culture may be corporate, but employees are quick to point out a number of its very non-corporate characteristics as well: "fun," "quirky" and "diverse," just to name a few.

The size of the company, which was founded in 1922 and now exceeds 17,000 agents, 68,000 employees and 75 million insurance policies, betrays its tight-knit culture. Employees have full access to State Farm's leadership, for starters.

"We can call up our senior management anytime," says one employee. "I constantly communicate with the top public affairs folks at our corporate office via phone, e-mail and in person. They always get back to us promptly and are helpful and encouraging."

Senior management's encouragement also includes strong support "for individuals to educate themselves both

internally and in classes," and the company "promotes from within and offers constant feedback."

Another advantage: "Diversity is huge at State Farm," a team member says. "We have a number of employee resource groups that focus on everything from gay and lesbian pride to Hispanics, African-Americans, women and the disabled."

But perhaps the most telling thing about State Farm as an employer is the longevity of many employees' careers, including one who has been with the company for 57 years—and counting.

"It's the best company I've ever worked for. It cares deeply about its employees," says another staffer, also noting that State Farm is one of the few companies that still offers employees a pension. "Would you leave this job?" the staffer asks rhetorically. **PRN**

► CORPORATE SYMANTEC

IT security powerhouse Symantec is also a hub for synergistic collaboration between employees and among departments. For starters, its performance-based approach to internal recognition incentivizes employees to constantly raise the bar; in fact, says one employee, "Our communications team has recently revised the way it promotes employees. Promotions are no longer based on management of individuals; instead, they are based on management of projects and responsibilities."

According to another staffer, "Symantec highly values its communications department. This translates into a dynamic team that provides growth opportunities for motivated employees."

Because of this, go-getters make up the vast majority of the communications staff. "Symantec allows its PR employees to run as fast as they're able to, and management provides

multiple opportunities for growth and career development," says one team member. "I've learned more at Symantec than at any other job I've ever had."

The cohesive team applies its collective energy to taking on new projects, but also to having fun together. According to one PR manager, "The internal culture is one of team unity and inclusiveness. We really work hard, but we play hard as well."

This balanced approach gives employees a well-rounded work experience every single day. "I've worked in agencies and in-house departments, and Symantec has provided the best work environment so far," another employee says. "There are no egos or politics within the communications team. We have the opportunity to question what we are doing, and to make changes. As a group, we are constantly asked, 'What do you want to do?'" **PRN**

► CORPORATE TURNER BROADCASTING SYSTEM

Originally purchased in 1970 by advertising guru R.E. Turner (aka Ted), the company officially became Turner Broadcasting System in 1979. Thirty years later, it is a leading media company as part of Time Warner, with the CNN network as one of its crown jewels. Despite this global notoriety, Turner "has always been and still is an entrepreneurial culture," according to one corporate media relations employee. "With our scale, global reach and range of networks, there is growth opportunity for individuals who create it for themselves."

This makes for a highly motivated workforce, which is rewarded with Turner's Total Rewards portfolio, which includes:

- On-site fitness centers and medical clinics;
- Travel discounts;
- Tuition reimbursement;
- A subsidized commuting program;

- \$10,000 in adoption assistance; and,
- An autism advocate program.

In addition to this robust benefits package, the company has a major commitment to professional development, with a range of education and mentoring programs that include Turner Women Today, Black Professionals@Turner and a Professional Development Center that offers more than 460 classes to employees throughout its network.

"Turner's work environment is creative, fast-paced, collaborative, diverse and forward-focused," another employee says. "Many departments with Turner offer employees the opportunity to briefly work in different divisions to gain a better overall knowledge of our business. Employees also have a platform to submit ideas to executives, giving everyone a voice in our company." **PRN**

AGENCY CARMICHAEL LYNCH SPONG

Founded in 1990, Carmichael Lynch Spong is now ranked among the 15 largest PR agencies in the world, but it still bills itself as the “alternative to big, bland firms doing ordinary, off-the-shelf work.”

The agency’s approach to hiring, which is to “attract like-minded achievement addicts,” gives it the edge it needs to differentiate its client offerings. Plus, once candidates become part of the family, they receive professional development programs to further elevate their skill sets. One of the programs, HeadRush, is “a mind-altering channel for professional development” that provides each employee with \$2,500 annually for professional dues, memberships, conferences and continuing education. Specific agency-led initiatives include:

- **Brain Candy:** A program to help new employees understand the agency’s people, processes and culture.
- **Supervisor Survival:** A quarterly training program for supervisors that includes coaching and performance appraisals.
- **Boot Camp:** A four-week training program for junior- and mid-level staff to teach them business development skills.



The firm also has a “deep-rooted and vibrant culture,” illustrated by “Spongsters” participation in activities like:

- A “Gobble Off” contest around Thanksgiving;
- A “Roofgating” celebration during the summer; and,
- “Morning Jolt,” a weekly activity to spark creativity.

Ultimately, the agency can be summed up by one Spongster’s statement: “Carmichael Lynch Spong prides itself on delivering not only great service to its clients, but exceptional recruiting and internal communications programs that keep its achievement addict employees engaged and challenged.” PRN

AGENCY CJP COMMUNICATIONS

CJP Communications is “100% entrepreneurial,” says one staffer, noting that the employees collectively refer to themselves as “an army of entrepreneurs.” Supported by its “Commission for Life” program, which rewards employees who introduce new business to the company, each individual at CJP Communications is given “a personal stake in the company’s growth.”

The internal culture—“clever, witty and quick, through and through”—is also one that encourages employee-driven innovations, both internally and externally. Its newest division, CJP Digital, is evidence of this. Complete with a robust microsite, it’s part of the firm’s goal to provide clients with “new model marketing services,” including digital marketing, branding, press and influencer relations and social media strategy development.

“If you’ve got a great idea, senior management is open to hearing your thoughts, so it’s easy to start something new,” says one

staffer. “Our new media group started with a plan, and now it’s one of the most successful groups at the company.”

CJP Communications then walks the walk and talks the talk by being active online in its own right, hosting dedicated CJP LinkedIn and Facebook groups, a YouTube channel and Twitter feed.

The culture also emanates a “work hard, play hard” mentality that translates outside the office. Employees take advantage of the firm’s regular happy hours and networking sessions. There is also an active group of volunteers who work with nonprofits including Partnership for the Homeless and Second Harvest.

All told, says one employee, “Our people are incredibly creative and have great ideas, which we translate into products that have set CJP Communications apart from other agencies.” PRN

AGENCY COHN MARKETING

Founded in the spring of 2000, Cohn Marketing quickly outgrew its initial location, a 150-square-foot “closet” located in Boulder, Colo., to accommodate the growing staff size. Now at 22 employees (and on its third office space) the firm’s shingle hangs in Denver, but its services support a global portfolio of clients. (Plus, the firm is “very pro-travel,” says one employee, which can be seen in its generous vacation policy—in the neighborhood of five weeks paid time off).

Cohn Marketing’s “internal culture is driven by its “open-door policy,” in which all employees are all encouraged to interact and engage with each other regardless of title.

“We are a tight-knit community with a high level of respect for each other, whether you are in the PR department or on the creative team,” says one staffer. As a result, the staff has a dynamic combination of skill sets, allowing

employees to “step out of traditional PR roles” and “understand how to seamlessly merge public relations with other tactics.”

As far as opportunities to grow at the agency, it’s “ask, and you shall receive,” says one employee. “The team is encouraged to take on projects that grow the business. If the business is successful, then we will be as well.” Indeed, Cohn Marketing defines success in all things branding, ranging from discovery and strategy to planning and activation.

Cohn’s successful approach to employee relations and communications is evident by its employees’ overall view of the firm. According to one, “I have worked for a lot of agencies, and Cohn Marketing has been the first place I have worked that I don’t see myself leaving anytime soon. The leadership is stellar. I think Cohn Marketing is a hidden gem that I feel lucky to have found.” PRN

AGENCY MARINA MAHER COMMUNICATIONS

Marina Maher Communications (MMC) is committed to keeping all employee communications channels wide open. Whether through the monthly agency-wide staff meetings, monthly practice group meetings, the internal bimonthly newsletter “HotHotHot,” new employee breakfasts or the MMC Bunch Facebook page, the firm “prides itself on our level of communication and transparency,” says one employee. “We believe in communicating again and again and again.”

The approach has served the agency well for its 25 years in business, making it poised to succeed in the 25 to come. Its Rotating Staff program is one example of the firm’s attention to professional development needs, giving junior staffers rotating three-month positions in the media department (which handles traditional and social media releases and specific events) to broaden their knowledge of the industry.

Then there is the MMC Masters Program, a multi-level training program designed to enhance employees both person-

ally and professionally. Customized to fit individual career levels, it features interactive workshops on topics that include:

- Building effective communications skills;
- Managing across levels;
- Writing skills;
- Effective budgeting; and,
- Client leadership.

According to one MMC-er, “Our philosophy is based on deeply held beliefs about what makes a great organization. It’s baked into the DNA of our company and our employees.” PRN



AGENCY MWW GROUP

Employees view MWW Group’s culture as one that “is about striving to be excellent every day and to produce award-winning and effective work for clients.”

This internal culture drives the “Aim High. Deliver” attitude that can be seen in each employee’s client work, and across all the many disciplines that MWW Group’s expertise spans.

This high-stakes mentality also contributes to a work environment that employees describe as “exciting” and “dynamic.” Giving back also plays a big part in the firm’s culture, with employees getting paid time off to volunteer for the cause of their choice through the CommunityWorks program. Plus, the MWW Group Green initiative is an umbrella for all the agency’s efforts to fight global warming by becoming carbon neutral.

“This firm really walks the walk,” says one employee,

pointing to internal programs such as “No Drive Workdays,” a policy that lets employees work from home two days per month to save gas money while minimizing their carbon footprints.

Growing from a regional firm to one of the nation’s top 10 PR/communications agencies, MWW Group is dedicated to cultivating a results-driven culture inside and out—something best summarized by those who know best: the employees themselves.

“I’ve been at MWW Group since we were a scrappy independent agency and, 10 years later, we still have the same never-say-die and mega-passionate corporate culture that existed when I first stepped in the door,” says one longtime employee. “This is a company where you will be challenged to bring your A-game every day, and that’s what I like about working here.” PRN

AGENCY STERLING COMMUNICATIONS

Sterling Communications’ employee track record is ... well, sterling, having never recorded a single layoff in the Silicon Valley-based firm’s 20-year history—not even during the dot-com bust or the current downturn. Thus, the agency is all about internal growth, beginning at the entry level. Currently, 75% of the staff above the senior account executive level started with the company as account assistants.

“We invest a serious amount of time and energy into our internship experience, the Geared Up Program,” says one employee. “We also place a strong emphasis on educating our employees in social media.”

This future-facing approach has suited Sterling Communications well, making it one of the premier social media relations firms; in fact, tech journalists have ranked Sterling as one of the top agencies for the second time in three years.

Ever the Web gurus, Sterling’s tech-savvy employees create

a complete digital experience both inside and out, even going so far as to make their corporate Web site 100% solar powered.

Ultimately, says one Sterling staffer, “We are a team that works hard and then plays hard. We host beach-side barbecues to enjoy summer, commit weekend hours to group volunteering and host cookie exchanges and holiday parties. We also encourage creativity through art projects during our annual agency summit, which then get hung in our offices.” PRN



Sterling employees at the company’s 20-year anniversary BBQ.

AGENCY TEXT 100

This tech-centric boutique consultancy tags itself as “big agency 2.0,” combining analyst, traditional and social media to offer best-in-class insights to its global client portfolio, which includes multinational behemoths like IBM, eBay and Philips.

Text 100’s innovative spirit comes from within. Its staffers contribute their local perspectives to the overall firm’s global fluency (speaking of fluency, more than 40% of employees are multilingual or have worked in more than one region). The Global Secondments program allows employees to transfer to one of Text 100’s 30 global offices, and overseas assignments are the rule rather than the exception.

The philanthropic initiatives undertaken by “Texties” are also global in nature, ranging from a summer “sleep-out” in the streets of London in support of Action for Children, to an eco-office audit in the company’s Shanghai and Beijing offices. Plus, its partnership with TechnoServe, which seeks to help entrepreneurial men and women in developing countries build

businesses, has taken employee volunteers to the likes of Tanzania and Latin America for pro bono projects.

The culture, described by employees as “quirky,” “coolly nerdy” and “fun-loving,” is all about open collaboration, which is further facilitated by the cubicle-free, newsroom-style office setting. Advancement is purely performance-based, and the firm’s 88% voluntary retention rate is proof of its highly motivated workforce.

As one employee puts it, “Text 100 is a great place for smart, ambitious, creative and passionate professionals to work with like-minded colleagues who continually challenge the status quo, and who chafe under the constraint of following the herd. We strive to be out ahead of the pack, blaze new trails and shape our destiny.” PRN



AGENCY WAGGENER EDSTROM WORLDWIDE

Waggener Edstrom Worldwide is “committed to helping employees realize their own potential,” says one employee, pointing to the fact that the agency has a number of vice presidents who started as interns. “WE provides employees with what they need to grow and develop their careers, starting from day one.”

The agency, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in November 2008, has a global presence, which it encourages employees to take advantage of with programs like Global Exchange—“where employees swap roles with individuals in other WE offices to learn cultural differences and local practices.”

This global mind-set also comes through in the agency’s commitment to fostering a diverse workforce. Waggener partners with Howard University for recruitment, participates with the LaGrant Foundation and has an official Diversity Council to “broaden our commitment to diversity, which we define as going beyond ethnicity to include differing backgrounds, skills, life choices and interests,” says a staffer. “WE believes in balancing our commitment to

employees and clients with a dedication to enriching the communities in which we live and work.”

This open-mindedness is further cultivated by a culture that is “a strong reflection of

our values”: collaboration, curiosity, innovation, integrity, passion and respect. These values began with WE’s co-founders, Melissa Waggener Zorkin and Pam Edstrom, and continue today.

“Waggener Edstrom is an agency formed by two passionate women who have continually broken through communications barriers on behalf of our clients and our industry,” says one employee. “These individuals would be the first to tell you that the secret to our 25-year success is, first and foremost, our people.” PRN



AGENCY WEBER SHANDWICK

Employees describe Weber Shandwick’s internal culture as “entrepreneurial” and “collaborative,” noting the firm’s focus on professional development through more than 100 different programs made available through webinars, e-learning and live classroom training.

“Employees are empowered to draw on and learn from the best talent, services and resources across our network to meet and exceed goals,” says once Weber Shandwick employee. “We seek out people who are true advocates—superb team players that are client-focused and from different backgrounds, and who can work across different cultures.”

The ability to work in a diverse environment is certainly important, especially considering the fact that Weber Shandwick’s network spans the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific. To encourage collaboration while staying true to its local employees’ roots, the agency maintains

“local culture clubs, memberships, recognition programs, intramural sports leagues and seasonal outings,” as well as diversity councils in offices across the network.

“Maintaining a climate of inclusion is a priority at Weber Shandwick,” a staffer says. “Under the leadership of the executive team, offices through the United States have established diversity champions to execute inclusion strategies at the local level.”

These efforts keep employees engaged and drive the agency’s “Advocacy Ignition” approach, a collaborative, research-based work process that centers on moving individuals from insights to action.

“Our offices offer unique approaches to creating a stimulating and fun environment,” says another staffer. “We demand the highest standard of ethics and integrity, and we celebrate our people’s successes.” PRN

NONPROFIT CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY OF FLORIDA

With more than 100 sites located throughout the state, Children's Home Society of Florida depends upon streamlined communications between and among all employees, from social workers and case managers on up to support staff and managers. Digital platforms help make this possible.

"We have an internal online learning management system that offers a large variety of trainings—everything from stress management to Microsoft Office training," says one employee. "We're also encouraged to stay active in professional associations like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Professional development opportunities are ongoing, and there is never a shortage of feedback and motivation to seek new avenues for growth."

This helps the "caring," "dedicated," "fun" and "mission-motivated" staff stay ahead of the curve, constantly "pushing the envelope" to expand the social services it has made available to children and their families for more than 100 years.

"This company is amazing, and it starts at the top," says another employee. "Our CEO is 100% dedicated to our clients and our staff, and that attitude permeates the entire company. Moreover, the professional growth opportunities are practically limitless, and everyone is motivated by our mission." PRN

NONPROFIT GEORGIA TECH RESEARCH INSTITUTE (GTRI)

As a nonprofit research organization that does government and industry work, GTRI's external face is "creative, innovative and all business," says one employee. "But internally, we are a very fun organization with people who don't take themselves too seriously."

The playful culture suits the team well, with employee tenures averaging 10+ years. "When asked, they say they love the constant challenges, and that no two days are the same," a manager says. "Great benefits and excellent compensation are also a plus."

These advantages aside, the team's direct access to the institute's decision makers means that communications employees are always part of the organization's strategic planning process; their ideas support the core strategy, making for a highly entrepreneurial, rewarding environment. Another plus: flexible schedules.

"Telecommuting is not only allowed—it is encouraged," says one institute employee. "We find that it improves productivity and reduces sick time. It also keeps employees happy and out of the lousy Atlanta traffic."

For those employees who do want to go into the office and who have children, Georgia Tech has a day-care facility one block from its campus that is available to all institute employees.

All told, the pervasive enthusiasm among employees speaks volumes about the quality of life at GTRI. "I have never had a job where, after four years, I still look forward to going to the office every day," a communications employee says. "I have a feeling I will be staying here for a good long time." PRN

NONPROFIT CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Being a school district that operates in a major metropolitan area usually makes for inevitable bureaucracy-driven redundancies—but not so for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

"Our close-knit, collaborative approach to meeting the internal and external communications needs of the school district eliminates duplicity and provides a wealth of support for every individual in our busy communications department," says one employee, also noting that the chief communications officer and the executive director work diligently to cultivate an environment in which creativity can flourish.

This commitment benefits staff across the school system's various communications functions, including media and community relations, internal/external publications and Web site development. It also contributes to the unusually low turnover rate within the department, which employees attribute to "the strong sense of history within our ranks, and an understanding of the urban culture we serve."

In turn, the district's workforce is extremely diverse, reflecting the community it serves. Altogether, this makes for a dynamic internal culture that mirrors each employee's passion for children and education.

"Because kids and their families are at the heart of everything we do, our work every day becomes a matter of heart," a district staffer says. "While the messages we deliver can stem from both positive and negative circumstances, our mission as a communications team remains constant: to deliver the most accurate, informative and useful information possible for our internal and external publics." PRN

NONPROFIT KAISER PERMANENTE

Given its position in the healthcare industry, it's probably not surprising that Kaiser Permanente offers employees "phenomenal health insurance," but it also goes above and beyond with unexpected benefits, including a liberal telecommute policy and the option for new mothers to work four days a week—a "loyalty-inspiring" bonus, according to one new mom who works in the nonprofit's communications department.

In addition to these extras, Kaiser employees are encouraged to exercise and required to volunteer during the work hours, and their compensation is further boosted by weekly professional development courses, biannual reviews and fast-track positions.

As far as the internal culture goes, Kaiser Permanente's is "diverse," "inclusive," "brainy" and "highly democratic"—decisions are often made by committee and consensus. Senior leadership fully supports the organization's democratic approach to decision making, maintaining open-door policies and team-oriented management styles that focus on growth and professional development.

"Employee engagement is a core part of our organization's tradition and culture," says one of Kaiser Permanente's communications consultants. "We serve our communities regularly, encourage volunteerism throughout the year and have an annual award for those who excel in community service."

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