

Why Top Employers Are Talent Magnets

By GARY M. STERN, FOR IBD



Computer science students from Japanese universities gather around a sign during a tour of Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. Google lets imagine how skilled the top five world-class golfers and tennis players are. Similarly, the companies rated as the top five businesses to work for globally are viewed as the best in their class, and their rankings can help lure the best talent. You might be surprised at the very best companies to work for named by

130,000 worldwide career seekers in a benchmark study by Universum, a branding company based in Stockholm. Its World's Most Attractive Employers 2010 survey gave the top five in this order: Search engine Google ([GOOG](#)), followed by consulting and accounting firms KPMG, Ernst & Young, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte.

Why do these players warrant these accolades? What practices do they engage in that other companies can learn from? To be included in Universum's list, companies need to have a mission that's clear to employees. They also must challenge staff and offer a dynamic work atmosphere. Since accounting firms must compete for specialized workers, it encourages them to become employee-centric.

Culture Is Everything

"Culture is the most important factor in being a great place to work," said Leigh Branham, co-author of "Re-Engage: How America's Best Places to Work Inspire Extra Effort in Extraordinary Times."

Factors contributing to creating this winning culture include: 1. Competent and caring senior leaders, 2. Managers who keep employees engaged, 3. Effective teamwork, 4. Job enrichment and professional growth.

At Mountain View, Calif.-based Google in the heart of Silicon Valley, culture enables staff to work at a "company that helps to change the world," said Todd Carlisle, an HR staffing manager at Google. Google's culture promotes "shared responsibility, shared ownership and a flat organization," he said. People don't have to wade through layers of approval to initiate a project. When Carlisle was named

head of a 100-employee HR unit, he asked for their top priorities and shared those ideas with colleagues. The staff also voted on which initiatives to focus on. At Google, staff decides on what's motivating them, rather than managers dictating projects.

Google's dedicated to innovation. Hence, it enables staff to spend 20% of their work time chasing independent projects. Branham calls this a "leading practice that drives employee engagement and business success."

Carlisle says Google's culture emulates what Google does. Google doesn't determine the answer to a search query; it leads people to find the best answers. "At Google, we try to find the best people and do everything we can to make them happy," Carlisle said.

PricewaterhouseCoopers workers mail ballots for the Oscars. AP [View Enlarged Image](#)



Since Google has grown and recently passed 23,000 employees, Carlisle says that preserving its unique culture has grown more complex. When it opened an office in Japan, a country that has its own unique culture, Google HQ didn't insist that the office be run in a particular way. It depended on local staff to set the tone.

Pay Isn't Pivotal

While salaries must be competitive, Branham noted that pay isn't the driving force that makes a company one of the most attractive to work for. Instead, most top-ranked companies create a sense of family, build personal ties between senior leadership and employees, and create a special atmosphere in which employees can have a major impact on the business.

At KPMG, the practices that make it special include chances for overseas postings, exposure to different industries and training rotations in auditing, consulting and other practices, says Blane Ruschak, its executive director of Campus Recruiting. Structured mentoring programs that start during internships and last for four years have proven effective as well. Launching a career at Montvale, N.J.-based KPMG serves as a leg-up for many different pursuits. It can lead to careers in public accounting, the private sector or entrepreneurship, Ruschak says. "We concentrate on making a person better every day on the job through training, community involvement and emphasizing work/life balance," Ruschak said.

While KPMG and Google draw many positive reviews on Web sites Vault.com and Glassdoor.com, where employees offer candid feedback on their companies, visitors can also see the firm's flaws.

One KPMG staffer wrote anonymously that the firm has a "top-heavy structure and limited room for advancement." A Google employee also commented on "a rise of red tape and scaling back on perquisites."

In the past, banking and investment companies made the list of the most popular employers. But many have since fallen off because they're perceived as having contributed to the global financial crisis, Branham says. Management consulting has also lost some of its cachet. He says it's attributable to effects of the recession.

Universum spokesperson Christopher Van Mossevelde says companies that make the top five invariably offer strong professional development, good prospects for future earnings and a creative and dynamic work environment.

Companies in the top five were likewise tested during the recession. The ones that prevailed and still made the list are those where "leaders don't isolate themselves at the top," Branham said. Leading companies, he said, were also those that asked employees for their problem-solving suggestions. The top five companies to work for stress "employee engagement and encourage them to take initiative, not wait to be told something and not perform a job in a rote way," Branham said. The upside is that involved employees boost bottom-line results and encourage customer loyalty.

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