

100 Best Companies to Work For 2009

Celebrating the companies that know how to treat their employees right.

By Myke Folger and Nick Horton



Tangerine Travel boasts a "spa-like atmosphere" with weekly massages and yoga twice a week. The Frause Group gives all employees \$500 and four hours in July to go on a "shopping spree." The Resource Group offers free wine and beer on Fridays, while Madrona Solutions Group purchases Seattle Sounders tickets for its workers.

Those are some of the many enticing benefits offered to employees by this year's 100 Best Companies to Work For. Such extra delights are undoubtedly important morale boosters in these tough times. And some businesses offer even more substantial bonuses. Wouldn't it be nice to work at one of the 10 firms that helps employees purchase a home or at one of the 12 companies that gives paid, education-oriented sabbaticals?

Continuing a trend of past years, many companies have developed programs designed to encourage healthy habits among employees. Transportation Solutions provides fresh fruit and bottled water for snacking. Many have installed bicycle racks to encourage bike use. Of the 100 Best Companies, 41 have education and training programs in wellness. Close to half feature discounted membership to off-site health clubs, while 40 percent have stress-reduction programs and 23 percent have onsite fitness facilities.

Nowadays, it's the basics that employees tend to consider most important. Benefits, for example. Virtually every one of the 100 companies on our list offers health care coverage, and 59 pay 100 percent of their employees' health insurance premiums. Three quarters of the companies offer health insurance to same sex as well as opposite sex partners. Forty percent offer paid maternity leave while 26 percent offer paid paternity leave.

The results of our competition are based primarily on the nearly 10,000 surveys of employees who filled out extensive questionnaires about their employers based on criteria such as leadership, communications and training. Interestingly, an overwhelming number said the criteria of greatest importance to them were intangibles like "company culture" and "workplace environment," which are not usually major line items on a firm's budget.

Companies that scored in the top tier of their size categories were vetted by a panel of expert judges to determine the final ranking. Everybody should be proud of being on the Best Companies list. In the pages that follow, we list the top 100 and profile those that climbed to the top.

The 100 Best Companies to Work For

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Characteristics of a "Best Company to Work For"

Communication: Shares both good and bad news about the business. Makes management accessible to employees and encourages suggestions and feedback.

Training and Education: Promotes employee development, trains mentors and encourages employees to share expertise.

Responsibility and Decision Making: Fosters an environment of accountability. Gives employees latitude and authority. Encourages problem solving and teamwork.

Performance Standards: Has challenging but attainable performance standards mutually agreed upon by manager and employee. Conducts evaluations that are updated regularly.

Rewards and Recognition: Provides competitive and equitable salaries. Has performance based compensation. Provides bonuses for excellent performance. Recognizes individuals and groups as appropriate.

Benefits: Provides comprehensive benefits package including dental plan. Offers comprehensive retirement plan. Offers paid vacation and sick leave. Offers flexible hours, telecommuting or job-sharing opportunities.

Leadership: Inspires employees to do well. Encourages team spirit. Respects employees and their opinions. Promotes diversity. Encourages employees to take leadership. Builds strong relationship based on trust.

Work Environment: Encourages creativity and brainstorming. Is comfortable and safe. Reflects balance between work and personal needs.

Hiring and Retention: Offers opportunities to advance. Has low turnover. Has formal program for identifying future leaders.

Corporate Culture: Encourages employees to act and think independently. Focuses on long-term success. Allows employees to act on convictions.

Best Companies Judges

Christina Hemmen: Human Resources Location Leader, Deloitte, Seattle

Al Lopus: President, Best Workplaces Institute

Scott Ofstead: Vice President of Human Resources, Kibble & Prentice

Scott Rabinowitz: Managing Director, Seattle, DHR International

Josh Warborg: District President for Northwest Operations, Robert Half International

SMALL COMPANIES

RANK	COMPANY NAME	WEBSITE	SCORE	INDUSTRY	NO. OF WASH. EMPLOYEES	TOP EXECUTIVE
52	National Specialty Underwriters Inc.	nsui.com	78.2	Insurance	44	Chris Randall
53	MTR Western	mtrwestern.com	77.1	Transportation services	48	Darren Berg
54	Brighton Jones LLC	brightonjones.com	76.5	Financial services	28	Jon Jones
55	Freestone Capital Management	freestonecapital.com	73.3	Financial services	34	Scott Svenson