

What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By Gary M. Bolinger, CAE, President & CEO, Indiana CPA Society

So many organizations look at the key to success as being the products or services they offer. In some cases it is the loyal customer/client base. But it really is about the most important asset of any organization – people. Without your people – and it makes no difference what kind of business you are in – you have nothing. No one to design, to implement, to market or to sell. People are your most important asset and should be invested in accordingly.

We all know that personnel costs are high and going higher. But there are plenty of other investments that should be made in people. Spend a few minutes walking around your office talking to your people. All of your people. Ask how the day is going. Ask about the physical space they occupy – desk, seating, lighting and the technology. Technology is an important aspect of how your people feel about how much the employer cares about them and their ability to get the job done.

Leaders need to recognize that people have feelings. People like to share and celebrate successes and milestones like birthdays and employment anniversaries. Make it a point that every birthday, employment anniversary and business success is celebrated in some way. Do this with the full involvement of as many other people as possible.

People both want and need to learn today. Peter Drucker started talking about “knowledge workers” in the 1960s. The concept is more important today than ever before. Make sure that everyone on your team has opportunity to learn and grow. To some young people, this ability to gain knowledge and skills is the most important fringe benefit. You don’t need to send everyone to an expensive seminar. In-house training works. Buy someone a book that reflects good business practices or reflects your business philosophy. I ask anyone new to our management team to read *The Effective Executive*.

Finally ... COMMUNICATE. The biggest single problem any business has is communications. Make sure everyone knows what they need to know. Ask questions. Don’t give directives. You will never know if people understand your philosophy or your business goals if you don’t ask questions. Of course this implies that you will actually listen. It may be hard to get a straight, complete answer in the beginning. But, the more you do this, the better the answers will be and the better the organization will become.



Gary Bolinger

A WINNER'S
VIEW

What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By Gordon Gurnik, President, RCI

From a leadership perspective, experiencing the inner-workings of a company – finding out what really makes it tick – is worth its weight in gold. At RCI Indianapolis, one merely needs to step into our dynamic call center to get a sense of the unique pulse of our business. Here, you’ll experience RCI in its purest form. More than half of our 1,000 Indianapolis associates serve as vacation guides. These associates are the face of RCI, who send our members on dream vacations.

It’s one thing to experience RCI’s call center as a passing guest; it’s another thing to live it firsthand. I know this because I started out as an Indianapolis vacation guide in 1987. I, and so many of our current Indianapolis senior leaders, share these early RCI roots, and this special connection has helped shape the foundation of our 38 years of success. In fact, our collective RCI tenure spans more than a century. Certainly, experience such as this in any corporate environment is a rarity, and it has truly come to differentiate RCI Indianapolis as “one of the best.”

Just how our collective tenure ties to our associates’ satisfaction is reflected in the second-to-none workplace culture we’ve been fortunate enough to build, mold and strengthen along the way, as well as the career development confidence we’ve instilled in associates. We know RCI because we’ve lived it, and that allows us to be the best leaders for our teams.

We understand the importance of being honest, visible and accessible. Beyond our routine associate opinion surveys, having a solid, well-rounded, veteran leadership team in place is one of the best company results you can publicize. It demonstrates our strong commitment to offering all associates opportunities for career development and advancement.

All of our available Indianapolis job openings are posted internally and an impressive 56% of them are filled internally. We’re constantly encouraging associates to explore, network and take advantage of new opportunities to build their RCI portfolios. We can’t succeed without people that are passionate and engaged. At RCI Indianapolis, we truly have both driven associates that put their heart and soul into delivering phenomenal customer vacations and a leadership team that is always rooting for them.



Gordon Gurnik

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What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By Scott Teffeteller, President and CEO, Union Hospital

It has been just over a year since I assumed the role of president and CEO at Terre Haute's Union Hospital, and the year has been filled with a demonstrated commitment to continued improvement and growth. The development of several initiatives has opened communication channels, established a culture of accountability and excellence, and put Union on a path of successfully addressing health care reform.

Particularly important has been making communications a top priority. I believe that one can never communicate too much and have focused on establishing a code of transparency throughout the hospital. Some of the communication techniques have been to include a monthly CEO column in the employee newsletter, send a weekly e-mail to employees to provide administrative updates, implement an improved leader-rounding program and provide quarterly administrative updates for staff in a video format. The additions have been very effective in sending information out to staff throughout the organization and focusing communication to employees regarding several key issues, including quality initiatives, financial information and strategic goals.

The happiest employees are those who feel they are listened to, who are involved in processes and changes, and who have administrative staff available to them. I also believe in being honest and open, which fosters a community of respect. In addition, I am a believer in transparency and feel strongly that the more information employees have, the more engaged they become. That transparency has assisted in opening the doors of communication between employees and administration, which is allowing everyone to move forward together in the hospital's mission to serve patients with compassionate health care of the highest quality.

We are a teaching hospital, providing education and training to family medicine physicians, medical students, nursing students and other allied health professionals. We're proud to have been recognized as a Best Place to Work by *Modern Healthcare* magazine; as one of Health Care's Most Wired; a Best Place to Work by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce for the fourth year in a row; named to Solient Health Care's Most Beautiful Hospital in America Top 20 list; and recognized by National Research Corporation as a Consumer Choice Award Winner for the Terre Haute area.



Scott Teffeteller

A WINNER'S VIEW

What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By John F. Gause, President, Apex Benefits

Apex Benefits is honored to be recognized as one of Indiana's Best Places to Work in 2012. For nearly a decade, we have been proud to be of service to Indiana's most respected organizations. Our success comes not only in serving our clients, but also in creating a superior workplace environment for the heart of our business – our employees.

We promote four key commitments in our business promise: accountability, empowerment, integrity and excellence. We believe that adhering to these principles within our workplace is a critical component to creating a positive and healthy environment. Employees who are treated with respect and honesty feel that they are a valued asset of our company.

Our first key commitment in our business promise is accountability. Apex Benefits focuses on accountability as we hold ourselves responsible to our clients, colleagues, business partners and community. We believe that responsibility for our actions makes us value the thoughts and time of others.

Our second key commitment is empowerment. We share our knowledge with our clients to help them effectively manage their benefits programs. We also share ideas and resources within our business so that employees feel they have the support of management and fellow employees. We believe open communication and sharing gives everyone the feeling of being part of our team.

Integrity is our third key commitment. We adhere to the highest ethical standards in everything we do, say and promote. Direct communication and positive feedback allows everyone to feel that honesty and integrity are always expected in our workplace. We believe that these commitments encourage everyone to have a positive "can do!" attitude.

Finally, we strive to always provide unprecedented levels of service to every client in our goal of excellence. We believe that providing the best possible service makes clients happy to work with us – and the cycle is strengthened when the employees build relationships with our clients.

At Apex Benefits, we know our business is only as good as our employees, so we strive to start with excellence in our workplace.



John F. Gause

A WINNER'S VIEW

What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By Mark Robison, Chairman and President, Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company

At the heart of every excellent workplace is an engaged group of employees – people who contribute more than their time to an organization. At Brotherhood Mutual, we are very fortunate to have people who are committed to the company's mission and who know their roles are important in carrying out that mission. I feel very blessed to be a leader of such dedicated people.

The efforts of our leadership team are focused on three key behaviors that I believe have the greatest impact on sustaining our culture of excellence: be transparent, avoid self-reliance and strive to change the world.



Mark Robison

Honesty is the best policy

Leaders need to be transparent with their staff. Anyone who isn't comfortable with this idea really isn't ready to lead. Some leaders may be fearful of sharing too much but, aside from what's confidential, I believe employees deserve to hear the truth. It's especially important for senior leadership teams to all be on the same page so that everyone hears, understands and shares the same messages. My philosophy is simple: Employees can ask me what they want, and I'll do my best to answer them honestly. If I don't know the answer, I'll ask a team member to fill in the information I don't know.

Better together

Leaders need a support system and behind every good leader is an excellent leadership team. I am very direct and very honest with my team. We don't always agree – their perspectives are sometimes very different from my own. I rely on their expertise, because the decisions we make affect the life of the company. I don't believe in the idea that I have the answers and I make the decisions. Self-reliance has no place in successful leadership. Leaders should build their teams with people who will speak the truth when they need to hear it and who they can trust to help make smart choices.

Strive to change the world

I encourage my team to dream bigger than the status quo. Leaders have to be willing to entertain uncommon ideas, and then, together, build a plan that will bring those ideas to life. Leaders have to be willing to hire people who can help them move the needle toward the vision, and they need to be sure to treat their people well. It's a very simple idea, but "do unto others as you would have done unto you" has proven a very successful approach for our company.

Build your team and determine your vision together. Then share it. This is my philosophy, and it's the one I use to lead Brotherhood Mutual.

**A WINNER'S
VIEW**

What Are the Keys to Leadership of a Best Places to Work Organization?

By Jay Love, CEO, Slingshot SEO

Many would consider this inquiry to be a loaded question. Some might even think it requires a lengthy in-depth explanation by an individual with a doctorate in human psychology.

I could not disagree more!

Sure, a knowledgeable answer from a doctor of psychology wouldn't hurt, but part of my reason for posing – and answering this provocative question – is the fact that I've been lucky enough to be one of the leaders of multiple Indiana companies that have received this award. Some may first ask if I have trouble holding a job, but I will save that answer for a future article.

In every case, the keys to leadership are quite simple to understand yet extremely difficult to put into practice. Let me outline the top three, after which you're free to agree or disagree.

1. Open and frequent communication: Today's workforce is far more engaged. They embrace each day for much more than just a paycheck. They are right-brainers, understand the organization's core services and strive to carry out your mission as part of their personal mission. If provided with open communication and a constant stream of unfiltered information, they will analyze everything and put in more effort than you ever dreamed possible. With each year, I am amazed by how much more the workforce tends toward this solid work ethic.
2. Treating every team member with respect: Operating with the mindset that each person on your staff is a team member, rather than employee, is a great first step. Involve them and encourage their feedback. Most importantly, listen to their feedback and ideas – truly and honestly. If a plan is your idea, or the culmination of ideas of a group you had part in, how much more passionately do you work to achieve the end goal versus if the plan or vision was never your idea in the first place? I'll bet there's a huge difference.
3. Ensure work is fun and rewarding: Who says you can't make your organization a fun place to be? Who says team members won't stay longer than normal hours would suggest? Cultivating an environment that encourages these qualities can range from crafting a welcoming space to promoting group activities to trusting team members' opinions. Think about the activities that are rewarding for you and your co-workers and employees. Any activity that falls into that category should be nurtured until it becomes part of your organization's culture.

My answer is that simple! It's more common sense than rocket science, but that's usually the case for anything of lasting value.



Jay Love

A WINNER'S
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