



# NO. 1 FOR MANY REASONS

## Employees Enjoy Best of Both Worlds

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Brace yourself.

Two worlds are about to collide ... and it's going to be extraordinary.

Remarkable things can happen when businesses successfully merge employees' professional and personal lives.

How do they do it?

**They're accommodating.** Hoping to attend your child's afternoon school function? No problem. Just make up the time.

**They're respectful.** Unsure how to tackle generational differences among your co-workers? We'll find solutions together.

**They're communicators.** Feeling disconnected from peers at another office location? Tell us what's missing.

Blending employees' various "worlds" – it's a winning strategy at these four companies. They represent the best of the best, soaring to No. 1 in their respective categories on the 2015 Best Places to Work in Indiana list.

Sharing their insights on what defines a Best Place to Work are the following:

- Nick Taylor, one of five owners at E-gineering, LLC (No. 1 small employer), [www.e-gineering.com](http://www.e-gineering.com)
- Kristy Applegate, director of human resources, Project Lead The Way, Inc. (PLTW) (No. 1 medium employer), [www.pltw.org](http://www.pltw.org)
- Megan Holford, human resources manager, Sikich LLP (No. 1 large employer), [www.sikich.com](http://www.sikich.com)
- Kevin Schloneger, financial advisor and regional leader, Edward Jones (No. 1 major employer), [www.edwardjones.com](http://www.edwardjones.com)

During the dynamic discussion, the group was unaware of its rankings, which remained confidential until the May 7 awards dinner.

### Time is on their side

All the riches (or wishes) in the world can't restore one of life's most precious commodities: time. Perhaps that's why employees rave about flexible schedules.

That's certainly the case at E-gineering, a custom software development firm established in 2000. The company, which has 50 employees, earned the No. 1 spot in the small employer category in 2011.

"One of the greatest things that sort of emphasizes our culture is our flexibility," Taylor asserts. "We're professionals. We're in a professional field. It comes down to the work hours, right? We have an employee that might work six hours today and 10 hours tomorrow. They know what job they need to do and get it done.

"We empower them to get their job done in the context of their life and then have a rapport that's real."

Sikich, a professional services firm with



"When I run a program as the HR manager, I try and find champions in each office. I'm not in those offices every day all day, so to make sure the right communication is happening and that people are getting excited about any given initiative – it's great to have somebody in each office that you know you could count on to roll that out."

– Megan Holford, Sikich

approximately 600 employees nationwide, has a similar philosophy. The company garnered the No. 1 spot in the large employer category for the third consecutive year.

"Professional services is not always a 9 to 5 (job) or a 40-hour week," Holford stresses. "One of the key things we offer is flexibility. And like (Taylor) said, you might leave early today for a doctor's appointment and work longer tomorrow. Nobody's really checking it on your timesheet. If you're getting your job done, you can have the flexibility that you need to take care of your family and your personal life as well."

She points to a "huge uptake" in the number of people seeking work/life balance through wellness: mind, body and soul.

"We have a wellness coordinator here at Sikich who does newsletters with recipes and stuff. We have a wellness challenge every year and a reimbursement of \$150 for each employee toward a gym membership, Zumba classes, marathon entry or whatever it is that they are doing.

"We've seen a lot of interest in that, in people who are trying to find some balance between work and family and taking care of themselves. That's been something we've seen increasing in our industry over the past few years."

### Stay tuned

More! More! More!

That seems to be the unofficial mantra for employees at all organizations, regardless of industry or company size, when it comes to communication. Keeping everyone connected can be challenging, however, particularly at companies with multiple locations or remote workers.

Financial services firm Edward Jones treats people as its most valuable currency. The company, which is owned by employees, has a workforce of approximately 1,000 at hundreds of small offices in Indiana. It promotes camaraderie among team members and their families at scenic three-day regional meetings.

"When we get together as a group here in Indiana, there's always people from the home office (based in St. Louis) that come out and take part in those meetings and listen to the feedback," Schloneger comments.

Edward Jones topped the large employer category on the Best Places to Work in Indiana list from 2006-2008 (prior to 2013,



"We have a lot of offices that have two employees or three, so one of the little things I think we all take for granted is that we're all in charge of our own office. It's almost like we're empowering the financial advisor and the branch administrator to make that office what they want to make it – and that's a benefit."

– Kevin Schloneger, Edward Jones

there were only two categories: small and large.) It's one of two organizations that has ranked on the Best Places to Work in Indiana list all 10 years of the program.

PLTW – which develops and designs curriculum in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) for students in grades K-12 – relocated its national headquarters to Indianapolis from upstate New York in 2011. It has 165 employees, up from 148 during the Best Places application process.

"We've grown tremendously since we've been here – probably almost tripled in size," Applegate declares. "We have about 60% of our team members in Indiana and the other 40% is spread out across the United States."

Skype helps PLTW go the distance – literally – by facilitating quarterly all-staff meetings, professional development and more.

"We have a conference center that has technology for everyone to (remotely participate in) meetings. We even did a live stream for the (annual) cornhole tournament so people could see and watch the action," Applegate offers with a smile.

Speaking of that cornhole tournament ...

"It generates a lot of buzz in the office and we continue to work while we do it so it's really fun," she observes. "We even have remote team members that are coaches, so they're on the teams as well and they get to share in the prizes. They'll send in positive messages and videos of themselves playing cornhole too. It's kind of silly fun, but we try and engage everybody in the activity, and

generate some extra teamwork and collaboration of a different kind.”

At Sikich, which operates 11 offices across the United States, access to company news is just a phone call – make that a webcast – away.

The firm’s CEO and other key leaders deliver one- to two-hour live broadcasts revolving around company goals and other announcements.

“People enjoy those, whether it’s live to them or via webcast,” Holford notes.

She also works closely with colleagues throughout the firm to help ensure that employees are informed and feel connected.

“We try and have programs that are applicable to all of our offices. When I run a program as the HR manager, I try and find champions in each office,” Holford explains. “I’m not in those offices every day all day, so to make sure the right communication is happening and that people are getting excited about any given initiative – it’s great to have somebody in each office that you know you could count on to roll that out.”

Although E-gineering is a technical company, its emphasis on making business personal creates a culture of communication. The firm holds monthly employee lunches and maintains constant dialogue with team members regarding projects.



“One of the greatest things that sort of emphasizes our culture is our flexibility. We have an employee that might work six hours today and 10 hours tomorrow. They know what job they need to do and get it done. We empower them to get their job done in the context of their life.”

– Nick Taylor, E-gineering

“Our products and services are very relational, so we feel that our value goes way beyond the technical expertise that we bring,” Taylor imparts. “It’s more of a personality that we bring to the team and to the project, so we pay attention to that.”

“We often get retrospect and feedback after a project. If it’s a long project, we have certain milestones that we’re continually checking – not only with the client, but definitely with our people – so we have an ongoing open dialogue, we feel, with our folks. That’s been really, really crucial to us.”

### Small gestures, big impact

The little things go a long way in generating employee satisfaction.

Take E-gineering, where the way to some workers’ hearts is through their appetites.

“We keep our office stocked with food, snacks, anything we can think of. You need gum, take a pack of gum. For us, it’s a perk that goes so far because we all like to have snacks and eat.

“Another thing is allowing kids to come into our office. We have toy boxes here and there. They come in because they want to see mom or dad at work. We welcome that. The kids know where to go to get the fruit snacks or whatever they grab,” Taylor describes with a laugh. “It blends in with everyday (life at the company). It’s small (in terms of the investment), yet it’s huge for us.”

Schloneger appreciates Edward Jones’ unique makeup, which offers a way for individuals to take ownership of their positions.

“We have a lot of offices that have two employees or three, so one of the little things I think we all take for granted is that we’re all in charge of our own office,” he contends. “It’s almost like we’re empowering the financial advisor and the branch administrator to make that office what they want to make it – and that’s a benefit.”

PLTW takes employees out of the office and into the classroom to see their hard work in action.

“We offer school visits monthly – sometimes more often than that as part of our onboarding plan,” Applegate notes. “Folks that haven’t joined us from education backgrounds, which there are many, actually get to see what the students are working on in the classroom, (the curriculum and projects) that our team members have designed, and how excited the students are and how engaged they are in the learning process.”



“The data has become very powerful in being able to tell the story of what’s happening in an organization. If your ears are open and you’re listening, they are telling you what they value in a best place (to work) and what would make it a best place (to work) for them.”

– Kristy Applegate, Project Lead The Way

“It’s an HR dream to work in that kind of environment where everyone is truly passionate about the mission that we have and the ability to impact students the way that we do and their futures.”

### Diversity: breaking down the barriers

Multi-generational workforces present both challenges and opportunities.

“At Edward Jones, we do a lot of research on investor behaviors based on the different generations and what they’re after and what they want in services. But at the same time, we want to hire every diverse background of employees to reach these people,” Schloneger explains. “We have to change the way that maybe we train them (and offer) more remote training or whatever. We definitely want to match the clients that are out there.”

Mandatory generational training is the name of the game at Sikich.

“We do kind of struggle with (generational differences) here,” Holford acknowledges. “We’ve seen some issues in that some of the more traditional folks are very interested in having people be in the office face to face and they don’t like the remote (work arrangements) as much. That’s something that our newer generations value more.”

“It’s definitely something in our size organization that we deal with and we see, but something that we try to use as an opportunity and advantage to get people talking and understanding where different people come from.”

## Making the best even better

E-gineering, PLTW, Sikich and Edward Jones don't simply collect employee feedback and file it away. They consider the input a powerful tool to enhance their workplaces.

E-gineering's leadership team shares findings with all employees.

"We want to be transparent and not just (have) the ownership say: 'Okay, let's correct this,'" Taylor relates. "We let them know what everyone else is saying – good and bad – about the company so that we can address that together. It's really a team effort."

At PLTW, Applegate and others "slice and dice the data."

When employee input revealed a growing desire for a tuition reimbursement policy, for instance, the organization implemented one.

"The data has become very powerful in being able to tell the story of what's happening in an organization," she asserts. "It's more than just a feeling or more than a few people making comments here or there. It gives you a much more solid platform to be able to recommend new strategies and new programs to implement because it's what your team members are saying."

"If your ears are open and you're listening, they are telling you what they value in a best place (to work) and what would make it a best place (to work) for them."

Holford echoes that sentiment.

"It also helps us to make those recommendations to our board when we have data across offices to support it. ... It's hard data on what people are asking for, so it gives a way to support those investments. That's been very important for us."

"Our employees wanted to know what it would take to be part of the leadership team or (what they needed to do) for leadership development," Schloneger chimes in. "We worked hard to create a

leadership development plan working on self-development as well as helping the leaders develop the different people in their area."

## Lasting impact

No guts, no glory.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being named a Best Place to Work is the accompanying accolades.

That's good news for retention and recruitment efforts.

"In terms of recruiting, we communicate – whether it's through Twitter or LinkedIn – 'If you want to work for a Best Place, we're hiring,' Applegate shares. "We definitely try to shout that to the rooftops from a recruiting standpoint."

Taylor enjoys discovering best practices at fellow honorees' workplaces.

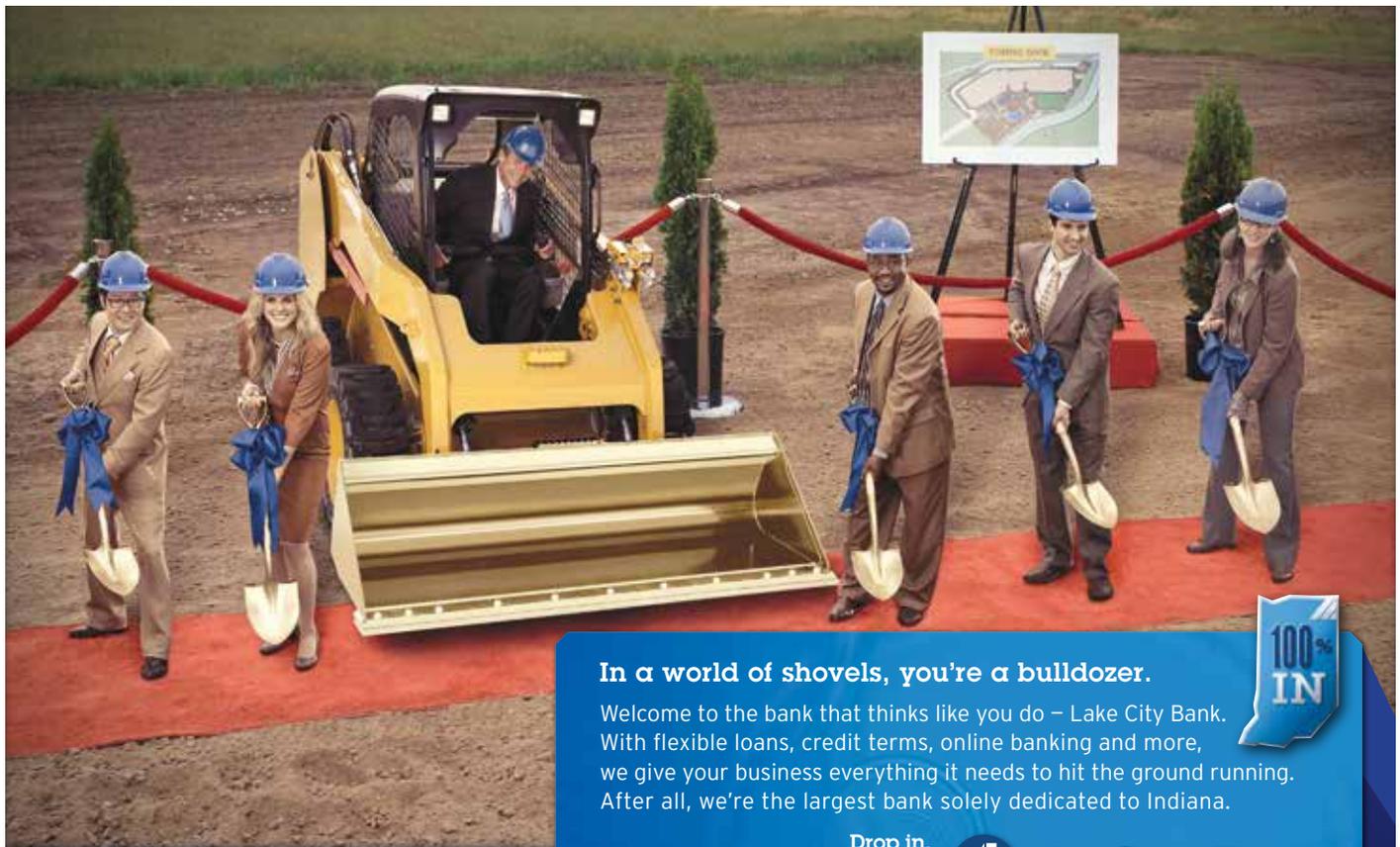
"We like watching the other companies, going back to find out what they're doing and saying, 'Hey, why aren't we doing that?' We learn from each other."

Holford identifies another benefit of participating.

"One, it helps you know your organization. Maybe there's some things that are surprises or maybe it continues to solidify what you think you know about your whole organization," she suggests. "You get that connection with other (winning) companies and the recognition both internally and externally of what your company's doing. I think there's great value in that."

Taylor brings the message home.

"One thing that's been helpful to us and a fun thing is (that it's) more for us about the 'whole of life' versus just a workplace because work is just a part of that. It's passionately what the owners believe."



**In a world of shovels, you're a bulldozer.**

Welcome to the bank that thinks like you do – Lake City Bank. With flexible loans, credit terms, online banking and more, we give your business everything it needs to hit the ground running. After all, we're the largest bank solely dedicated to Indiana.

Drop in. **Lake City Bank**

100% IN