

AON HEWITT BEST EMPLOYERS AWARDS

Hotel's five-star values pay off

Marriott treats its staff like it treats its guests

MARK EGGLETON

IT'S a pretty good sign when a company's core belief stands the test of time. It's reassuring that in 1927 when J. Willard Marriott opened a root beer concession in Washington, DC, his first motto (now slightly paraphrased) — "Take care of your associates and they'll take care of the customer, the customer will come back and the business will take care of itself" — still lies at the heart of the Marriott brand.

From a root beer stand to a hotel management firm with more than 3700 properties across multiple brands bestriding the globe, much of the family company's extraordinary expansion can be attributed to its "people first" culture.

Speaking after Thursday night's Best of the Best presentation in Sydney, Marriott vice-president Neeraj Chadha said a highly engaged workforce simply comes down to quality leadership.

"You have to live, breathe and believe in the company's culture and philosophy. Leaders need to have the ability to recognise effort and give people opportunities."

According to Aon Hewitt's Stephen Hickey, Marriott Hotels and Resorts stands strongly as this year's Best of the Best Employers because it treats employees like guests. "The company offers an extremely strong global employment culture yet it still understands local sensitivities," he says.

Brisbane Marriott human resources director Nayna Panjanani agrees that the global culture prevails everywhere but the company does make sure it has the right local flavour across its five Australian properties.

She cites training as an example. Panjanani, who previously

worked in Mumbai, says India's training program is quite formalised whereas in Australia people like to be a little more independent so there is a lot of online learning.

"We put the onus on our local associates to learn although we obviously drive people learning in our hotels," she says.

"In each hotel we put aside a space for guided learning and we encourage all of our associates to discuss their career needs.

"Furthermore, we provide 40 hours of further training for each associate every year as we like to think we're developing people's skills within the company and personally as well."

"The company offers an extremely strong global employment culture"

STEPHEN HICKEY
AON HEWITT

She says the group's recruitment strategy is all about acquisition, development and retention. "We believe we hire the best and we treat them the best," Panjanani says. "We don't look for a specific skill set in new employees — we look for an attitude. We promise to give our people the necessary skills and we want to prepare our people for a global career."

Marriott puts an onus on strong succession planning and, because of Australia's mature hospitality sector, many local associates are earmarked for international roles as we are feeding talent into the fast-growing Asian markets.

"What we do is sit down as a management team and discuss global opportunities for our associates. Our best-performing associates and graduate associates from the hospitality education providers (who we work closely with) are picked up and fast-tracked," Panjanani says.

Nearly one-quarter of all Marriott's management in Australia saw a positive move last year, domestically or internationally.

As for communicating company strategy and goals in the Asia-Pacific region, everything is presented to individual hotel managers who are then responsible for disseminating the information through the hotel with everyone's responsibilities clearly outlined.

"Everyone is aligned with the company strategy and we want to ensure people's personal values are aligned with Marriott's values right down the line."

Beyond strategy and career planning, Marriott places a strong emphasis on creating an enjoyable workplace. On a simple level, all the hotels have a gymnasium and staff have free access to it. Each hotel runs specialised programs and gives out pedometers and drink bottles to promote exercise.

"We encourage healthy eating in our staff canteens with lots of healthy options and all meals are either free for staff or heavily subsidised," Panjanani says.

In the past couple of weeks every Marriott hotel has participated in "associate appreciation week", which involves events including special meals for staff and breakfasts for associates in hotel restaurants. In recent years they have conducted an Amazing Race in hotels for associates to participate in. "There are performances by staff members and more as we put a lot of effort into the week," Panjanani says.

Another interesting initiative is offering young associates the opportunity to work around the world. Panjanani says the company understands young people catch the travel bug so Marriott offers them the chance to work in Marriott hotels while they travel.

The company has numerous associate incentives such as guest nights. It also provides staff with special rates, and associates get their birthdays as a day off.



Nayna Panjanani, human resources director at Brisbane Marriott

Chorus of the contented as employees meet their aspirations

MARK EGGLETON

THE underlying goal for Chorus is that, when people are sitting at home at the age of 75, "we want them to reflect on their career and think Chorus was the best place they worked".

It's a big call from Sara Broadhurst, general manager of human resources at New Zealand's largest telecommunications infrastructure firm, yet she believes the company is heading in that direction.

According to Broadhurst, communicating the company's strategy clearly is done through its annual Line of Sight workshops.

"Everyone takes part," she says. "We start with the big global picture and then we hone that down to the New Zealand picture. People are engaged from the outset with the global outlook and then from the New Zealand picture we look at our company goals, then individual group goals, and this cascades through the business."

"We then ask people what their goals are for the year. Everyone talks about the business and their goals and there's a lot of interrelation between departments as they discover where there is crossover."

The company considers the workshops invaluable as departments get an immediate impression of where there's potential crossover. It's considered a more organic way of developing an annual development plan.

"People get to understand where they need to work and they can link their personal and organisational objectives. No one feels as though they're just tapping away — there's a real sense of where the company is heading."

"The workshops were initially developed a few years ago and what they've done is really drive people's connection to the company," Broadhurst says.

And what comes out of the

workshops is a strong engagement action plan that runs "365 days a year and is tracked across the company".

One way of keeping track is the company's "daily heartbeat" initiative. It involves everyone in the company (about 750 people) dialling in for a conference call to discuss any number of issues. Anyone can book in to speak.

Another initiative driving engagement is a group of Chorus guides in the company. They represent every part of the business. All employees are encouraged to go to them to discuss any issues they may have.

"For me, they're a great temperature check; a really good touchstone reaching into the heart of the company," Broadhurst says.

She says this focus on driving engagement is reflected in the annual survey. This year the company wanted to discover how well people understood the strategic plan. Second, there was a real focus on people's wellbeing.

"Sure we looked at physical health but we want to understand how people are emotionally; how they feel about their careers and the wider world," Broadhurst says.

"And on the career front we want our people to understand they can have a real, long-term career with Chorus but if they're

unsure about a path inside the company we'll pay for an external career coach for them to talk with."

Chorus also takes great pride in the fact it sees people as individuals. A particular initiative was running psychometric tests to see where every employee's own personal values lay.

The company then looked at the individual and collated results to get a better understanding of how the teams work within the organisation.

"We asked the staff to tell us what sort of organisation they wanted to work for and, from there, drilled down to a series of core values," Broadhurst says.

STRONG CULTURE IS THE KEY



Frucor New Zealand chief executive, Mark Callaghan

Juicing up fun factor in staff engagement

JAMES SHERBON

WHEN Gatorade launched in New Zealand last year, Frucor New Zealand's management team pulled off a remarkable coup in attracting Usain Bolt into town for a whirlwind visit.

And while he promoted the drink to Kiwi consumers as one of the brand's global ambassadors he spent the largest chunk of his time in one place. He spent it with Frucor's local staff.

According to the company's New Zealand chief executive, Mark Callaghan, Bolt's presence in a converted Auckland warehouse with all of the local staff was about promoting fun in the business.

It makes sense because if you're one of the region's leading energy drink manufacturers and suppliers marketing fun in a bottle, can or carton, your greatest ambassadors should be your people.

Callaghan says fun lies at the heart of all that they do because "we want to ensure people want to be here".

Across the ditch in Sydney, Callaghan's Australian counterpart, Jonathan Moss, says: "We don't take ourselves too seriously but we take our business very seriously."

For Callaghan, this means motivating people to give more for Frucor than they may elsewhere. "It's about having a clear strategy, objectives and goals with each person's objectives related to the company's goals, which are clearly articulated."

"Part of the key is the old days of just calling human resources are gone. Senior management takes full responsibility for the culture and we have devoted a lot of work over the years to driving engagement in the organisation," Callaghan says.

According to Moss, Frucor sets the bar high for employees and it's very motivating and engaging.

"Importantly, we do it in a way that is very values-based. We back people to take a risk in a highly supportive environment. I like to think we're like a Viking but with a mother's heart."

Moss believes engaging employees is not about having a program based around engagement, it's not an initiative, but it is fundamental to what the company does and it starts from the top and cascades through the business.

Part of ensuring the company strategy is well communicated is by imbuing the management team with the level of humility and self-awareness needed to communicate. "It's not rocket science, it's so simple to communicate a strategy and keep a constant conversation going with staff," Moss says.

"And when you value your staff as people they value you. Everyone takes responsibility for valuing each other — we get... higher engagement from staff," Callaghan says.

"We pride ourselves on building a strong culture and it's replicated wherever we take our Frucor business."

According to Aon Hewitt's Stephen Hickey, Frucor's success as a best employer lies in its ability to emphasise on the importance of bringing a more hardened performance edge to their business.

"They operate in a very competitive market (sports and energy drinks) with very demanding customers yet they can drive increased performance from their workforce because the leaders are very clear on their rationale and reasoning. The company drives performance through leadership and everyone is held to account right across the organisation," Hickey says.

Within this high-performance culture, succession planning is very important and the company works hard to provide people with a career path.

For Moss, the level of accountability at every level of the organisation, matched with strong communication, allows the company to spot emerging talent very quickly. The company also is willing to take a risk on people in the business who may not be immediately obvious as leaders but demonstrate strong people skills.

"What's the differentiator in every business? The people, not the brands," he says.

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Put smiles on their dials and watch rewards flow

Hilti has been named a great place to work for the third year running

MARK EGGLETON

WHILE many organisations sugarcoat their people achievements with a lot of pleasant-sounding human resources jargon, the managing director of Hilti Australia, Jan Pacas, simply says it has to be good for business.

For Pacas, the proof is laid bare at Hilti, where a highly engaged workforce has led to measurable improvement to the bottom line.

He says even just an incremental increase in the number of highly engaged employees (who are aligned with the company strategy) translates to a big effect on company performance.

"Highly engaged employees do create great value for customers and shareholders. The triple bottom line is working very well for us. We have a high-performance culture and high employee engagement which leads to high customer satisfaction, solid financial results and happy shareholders," Pacas says.

This is the third year in a row that Hilti has been acknowledged as one of the nation's best employers and Pacas says while some companies might be happy with being acknowledged once or twice, the challenge for Hilti is to further integrate an improving high-performance culture every year.

"We have massive expectations of stepping up internally and the executive team pushes hard to do better and outperform the market," he says.

While Hilti, the Liechtenstein-domiciled construction technology supplier, has implemented clearly defined human-resources best practices globally, Pacas says the key lies in how individual leadership teams adapt and apply these practices in local markets.

"At Hilti we have lots of best-employment practices globally but the local executive team has the freedom to apply what they think is right for the individual market. We leverage our global best practice with what best suits local markets."

For Pacas, who has worked in Asia, Europe and Asia with Hilti, this means understanding your people in different parts of the world as each location has a distinct workplace culture.

"In Australia, leaders need a high degree of authenticity and

approachability, which is very unlike Germany, for example, where it is very hierarchical."

Yet while allowances are made for local sensibilities, the strong culture at Hilti ensures everyone understands the company's strategic goals and direction.

"We have high expectations but we probably offer higher rewards and opportunities," Pacas says.

"We unashamedly promote a high-performance culture and there are regular discussions internally about expectations. Yet these are not adversarial discussions but transparent dialogues where everyone is aware of their goals and potential rewards."

A highly engaged workforce has led to improvement to the bottom line

"We're a leading brand and we have to get our people to believe in our strategy wholeheartedly, so we explain our goals in detail and the initiatives we have in place to achieve them."

For Aon Hewitt's employee-engagement practice lead, Stephen Hickey, the well-communicated company strategy lies at the heart of Hilti's success.

"They provide a high level of transparency between what each employee does and how it influences key priorities of the organisation. There's a real connection between what every employee does and their impact on the organisation's critical business outcomes," Hickey says.

Pacas says more than 90 per cent of employees are aligned with the company strategy and they're motivated by it.

And when the goals are achieved there have to be rewards. At Hilti, rewards at the most basic level are monetary. There's a base element plus extra rewards linked to sales, profit growth and achieving key performance indicators.

"In good years there's a large upside in monetary rewards but there are also non-monetary rewards such as incentives. Recently a group of 20 people went on a five-star trip to Hamilton Island. There also has to be peer rewards and smaller incentives awarded every day. These can be small and fairly broad such as just giving people recognition for a job well done," Pacas says.

On the performance-management front, Hilti likes to give three or four positive mess-



JEREMY PIPER

Jan Pacas, of Hilti Australia, which has again won a place on the Aon Hewitt Best Employers list

ages to employees for every developmental message.

Pacas acknowledges not everyone works out but the company insures itself against this through a rigorous selection process.

"We have a strong ingrained culture of values and that comes through in the recruitment process. Some companies look purely at a candidate's functional skills

but we look at their personal attitude and commitment. We can train people to work in the company and educate them on our business so we concentrate on getting the right sort of person," he says.

And if an employee is clearly deviating from their defined targets the company discusses the reasons. It will look at the market

conditions and try to find a way to remedy the situation.

As for succession planning, Hilti prides itself on the fact almost 85 per cent of management positions are filled from within.

And by creating so many managers from within, the company can export its talent around the world and provide employees with a truly global career.

AON HEWITT'S ACCREDITED BEST EMPLOYERS

THE WINNERS

BEST OF THE BEST

Marriott Hotels & Resorts

"The values established by our founders have served our company well and will continue to guide our growth into the future. Foremost of these values is the enduring belief that our associates are our greatest assets. We create an inclusive environment where talents and ideas can flourish and also drive business results."

Neeraj Chadha
Vice-president Australia

BEST EMPLOYERS 2013

Bristol-Myers Squibb

"Our culture puts patients at the centre of everything we do. At Bristol-Myers Squibb Australia, our team is passionate about discovering, developing and delivering innovative medicines that make a difference."

Anthony Mancini
Managing director

Chorus

"With such overwhelming evidence about the link between high engagement and great business results, why wouldn't you create a great place to work?"

Mark Ratcliffe
Chief executive

Cooper Grace Ward Lawyers

"Being a Best Employer is about leadership and commitment. It is about our leaders embracing the strategy and the desired actions and then living this each and every day. It is easy to do in good times but what is truly defining is sticking to our strategy when businesses conditions are challenging."

Chris Ward
Managing partner

Employment Innovations

"Having our team formally recognised for their dedication and effort has been a worthwhile process. We hope this will inspire us to find even more ways to improve how we recognise and engage our team."

Ben Thompson
Chief executive

Express Data

"Participation in the Aon Hewitt Best Employer process has been invaluable for Express Data. While we are proud of our certification as a Best Employer the major benefit has been the opportunity to benchmark our practices against other organisations and identify opportunities to further improve

staff engagement. Consistent improvements in staff engagement over many years of participation has ultimately improved our business results."

David Gage
Chief executive

FedEx Express (New Zealand)

"At FedEx, our people are our most important and valued asset. Through the excellent service our people provide, we are able to deliver our commitment to make every customer experience outstanding."

Kim Garner
Managing director, Australasia

Fiat Chrysler Group

"Driving leadership and a performance culture have been key focuses at Fiat Chrysler Group. They are imperative in the development of an engaged and energised workplace. Our staff engagement results are critical to the ongoing success of our business."

Veronica Johns
President and chief executive

Frucor Beverages (Australia and New Zealand)

"It is common sense, to me, that if people enjoy and respect the place in which they work, and find their roles fulfilling and appropriately challenging, then they will maximise their own potential and that of the business. It's a pretty simple formula, but one I think we should remember as business leaders."

Carl Bergstrom
Managing director

Hilti (Australia)

"We very much believe that the triple bottom line is a big part of our success. A highly engaged, high-performance workforce, driving strong customer satisfaction, creating superior stakeholder value."

Jan Pacas
Chief executive

Millward Brown Australia

"There is no substitute for a strong people focus. Make sure there are programs and processes in place that truly engage your teams and demonstrate that you value them."

Ben Dixon
Managing director

Peoplebank Australia

"At Peoplebank, we believe passionate, engaged employees create passionate, engaged customers, contractors and candidates that result in outstanding company performance."

Peter Acheson
Chief executive

Shire Australia

"The Aon Hewitt accreditation program's combination of internal employee surveying, external benchmarking against local best practice and timely

feedback leading to continuous improvement is a potent recipe for enhancing people management capabilities and over-achieving on broader organisational goals. So whether or not your company becomes an accredited Best Employer, it benefits just from participating in the process."

Dominic Barnes
Vice-president and general manager

Silver Chef

"Being a Best Employer means so much more than a badge of accreditation — it is about identifying the real reason why we as human beings organise ourselves in groups with a specific purpose and goal. Becoming a Best Employer as recognised by Aon Hewitt is a legitimate and objective verification that we are on the right path towards living our dream."

Charles Gregory
Chief executive

Smartsalary

"We believe that ensuring a highly engaged workforce is quite simply the singular most important factor that drives company performance. Without a highly engaged workforce all other strategies are at best feeble, but more likely largely futile."

Deven Billimoria
Chief executive

Stihl

"At Stihl we are committed to pursuing learning like profit and live by our philosophy that all our people are our most sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. Coaching is, therefore, a mandatory commitment for any member of our community with staff responsibilities."

Chris Radin
Managing director

The Wrigley Company

"Each of us is a stakeholder in our business, and we have a responsibility to uphold our principles and deliver great results. In return, each associate can expect to be respected, supported and valued as an individual, to be rewarded for their performance, and to have opportunities to grow and develop."

Andrew Leakey
General manager

Wood & Grieve Engineers

"Our focus is our staff. They must be kept happy, motivated and interested in the type of work they do. We respond to the needs of our people and develop our young talent to not only fast-track their careers but to also instill in them the importance of providing exceptional service to our clients."

Jose Granado
Chief executive

Wrigley keeps work fresh with local focus

LAUREN ARENA

A COMBINATION of local autonomy and global strategy, together with a progressive work environment, is the key to business success, according to Wrigley Pacific general manager Andrew Leakey.

"Creating a community-based business ensures stability and satisfaction in the workforce," Leakey says.

"The quality of our team is integral in making Wrigley a great place to work, as well as a marketing and production-innovation hub."

As a subsidiary of Mars Incorporated, confectionary manufacturer Wrigley has operations in more than 40 countries and product distribution in more than 180 locations around the world. But Leakey says his community-based approach has been fundamental to the multinational's success in the Pacific region, which

includes Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

"Our hugely popular product, Eclipse Chewy Mints, was an innovation to come out of Australia and is now exported to the rest of the world so it's really exciting to become a significant contributor to the Wrigley company at large and have our people on the global agenda."

Leakey explains that employees at Wrigley are known as "associates" since everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas and is expected to run the business as if it were their own.

"Our associate principle gives all employees a sense of ownership and care within the company so no matter the level of the position, everyone gets to have a say and everyone's voice is heard."

Leakey's leadership philosophy for Wrigley Pacific is focused on aligning the overarching culture of the multinational corporation with the requirements of the local workforce.

"While most businesses only have three guiding principles that are generally based around quality, mutuality and freedom, Wrigley has five. We've added responsibility and efficiency, which refer to our local responsibility to give back to the community as well our commitment to best practice on a global scale."

The company's Oral Care program, a local initiative that provides oral care services to disadvantaged communities, was launched in Australia five years ago and is exported to neighbouring countries throughout the Pacific. Leakey says such community initiatives keep employees engaged and passionate.

"It's really about giving back to the community and living up to our community responsibility, which comes back to a sense of ownership and pride," he says.

Wrigley Pacific is also leading the charge with employee well-being strategies and company cultural programs.

"You need to have a passion for being a progressive employer," says Leakey.

Wrigley's progressive workplace is centred on an employee wellness program that involves boot camp, yoga, access to healthcare and team-building events.

"This isn't a business-led initiative, but an associate-led initiative," says Leakey, who is converting a storage room in Wrigley's Sydney offices into a yoga studio.

"Understanding the needs of our associates and that these needs are changing is very important when it comes to employee engagement."

"Continuous improvement and accessible leadership are also significant in creating a positive work environment."

Wrigley conducts regular focus groups and annual surveys to measure employee satisfaction and Leakey says the company's low staff turnover is testament to its success.

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