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For Workplace News

NBC recently aired a report on why *Forbes Magazine* selected Google as the best company to work for in the United States. Following the broadcast, some enthusiastic Google employees posted the clip on YouTube, so anyone interested can understand why for themselves.

It's clear from the report that it takes a village to create Google – literally. The corporate headquarters has all the amenities of a self-contained community. Employees can come to work in their pajamas, eat at one of 11 high-end restaurants, listen to music, visit one of five medical doctors on staff, and even get their car washed - all at no cost. Not surprisingly, while other firms actively seek out new employees, Google receives thousands of e-mails a week from people wanting to join up. If so many are choosing Google, it must by definition be an employer of choice.

Corporate villages used to be called company towns, and they are nothing new, though they haven't always been so

Does it take a village? How your organization can become an employer of choice

favorably viewed. In the 19th century, the Howell Works, an iron works, was an employer of choice. It provided spacious housing for all employees, a post office, a mule barn, a church, a slaughter house, various trade shops, an apothecary, and a grocery. It even had its own currency.

The founder, James Peter Allaire, was ahead of his time. He realized that good health and an educated workforce was important to keep a workplace running. So he employed a doctor, set up a school for children, and employed a minister, full time. Employees returned year after year.

Google's version of the company town seems designed to satisfy the Generation Y employee's desire for work-life balance and community. By providing for every social and personal need at work, Google employees don't need to leave campus. It seems to be working. According to the NBC report, employees come to work late but stay hours past the official eight-hour day.

Is this really work-life balance?

Sleeping in, working late, catching a good meal, taking an exercise break with personal trainers, and getting your car washed at facilities close to your office, then heading back for hours more at your desk.

Would this fit your definition of work-life balance? It may sound great to some, but it doesn't work for me.

I'd like to suggest that it isn't the amenities that make a corporation an employer of choice, it's the values fit. After all, thousands of non-profits can barely afford instant coffee, but I suspect that there are organizations among them that have employees who are just as fanatical. I've known people who worked for the Peace Corps, for instance, and ended up engaged in the work of a lifetime in a real village, though a very different version than Google's.

The organization that will make you happy is the one that fits your values. Consider Google again. Its explicit corporate value statement is "Don't be evil." But in order to get Chinese government approval to enter the massive China market, Google needed to agree to censor its users. It did so, sacrificing integrity over the desire for profit. Google's idealistic Generation Y employees, however, were shocked and dismayed. A year later, Google's leadership agreed that the decision had been the wrong one, and backed out if its deal.

Companies that want to compete with Google for the vaunted status of employer of

choice, don't need to emulate Google's approach or match its financial outlay in amenities, they just need to be themselves.

express it in your workplace.

As a new definition of employer of choice, a company should:

1. Align individual employees with the company's values.
2. Contribute something to the betterment of society.
3. Not compromise its values in a crisis.
4. Ensure managers live the values and deal with direct reports accordingly.
5. Not pass off deadwood and viruses to another part of the company but deal with problems as necessary.
6. Treat people fairly and with respect – meaning according to the values.
7. Be honest and responsive with employees who do not fit, treating them with dignity even when they are being let go.

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- *The Talent Edge: A Behavioral Approach to Hiring, Developing, and Keeping Top Performers (John Wiley and Sons, August, 2001)*
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Being an employer of choice does not mean having a vaunted chef in the workplace cafeteria, or even free babysitting. It means creating a place of work where people belong, feel they are contributing to something larger than themselves, are treated with dignity and respect, and see others treated the same way. A few organizations like Google and the Howell Works have tried to create physical utopias as a way of harnessing the best out of people. To truly manage that, you need to know what your organization stands for, communicate that to your employees, and