

Best Places to Work 2009

A workplace analysis and competition

Partnership, volunteerism key for top businesses

By **Jeremy Stoltz**
News Editor

To enhance recruiting efforts and entice the most talented employees available, companies need to focus on and develop basic core values to attract gifted individuals, an industry speaker told a business audience.

"At the end of the day, we realize that our core values, that culture, that's what drives the company," said Jennifer Wilken, financial advisor for Edward Jones Investments, speaking to a group of honorees at The Business Ledger's Best Places to Work in Illinois recognition event, held at the Danada House in Wheaton.

Edward Jones employees follow the guideline laid out by two of its preeminent leaders, Peter Drucker and Jim Collins, she said.

Wilken quoted Drucker as saying, "The primary focus of our company is not to create a profit. A profit is a byproduct of success."

Collins said, "While a company needs to be profitable to exist, they do not exist merely to make a profit."

One of the main values at Edward Jones is called responsibility-based management.

"The idea is that everybody is fully responsible for a task and they are integral to the overall success of the company," Wilken said. "Without that, it's like there is a missing link."

In order to ensure what Edward Jones calls client service excellence, surveys are given to customers to gauge how well employees are responding to client needs.

A spirit of volunteerism is also necessary to ensure high morale and camaraderie among employees. This can be in the form of internal mentoring and training, as well as external group activities.



Jennifer Wilken, financial advisor for Edward Jones Investments, addresses attendees of The Business Ledger's Best Places to Work in Illinois recognition event May 19. (Photo by Dietrich Wolfram)

"That's another major aspect that key employees look for when considering a new employer, that spirit of volunteerism," said Wilken.

Enforcing the fact that every employee within the company is a key member of a partnership will keep employees engaged and help create a cohesive atmosphere that is appealing to potential recruits.

"Your employees and your key executives do in fact think of your company as a partnership," Wilken said. "It goes back to the idea that their responsibilities are going to have an impact on the bottom line."

Ted Jones, son of founder Edward Jones, had the opportunity years back to take the company public, which would have ensured his status as a multi-millionaire overnight. Yet he chose not to because money had never been his guide.

"I'm so thankful, as a limited partner, that Ted didn't take the company public," said Wilken. "But I'll have you know, I thought of myself as a partner long before it ever became official. And I'm willing to bet that your employees do, too."

Mid-Sized Companies

(15 to 249 Employees)

1. Tasty Catering
2. Skender Construction
3. Gerard Design, Inc.
4. Radio Flyer
5. Assurance
6. Administaff, Inc.
7. Digitas
8. Laurus Strategies
9. Perspectives, Ltd
10. Levenfeld Pearlstein, LLC
11. Lockton Companies, LLC
12. Rose Paving Co.
13. National Futures Association
14. The Effner Financial Group, Inc.
15. Rippinger Financial Group of Companies
16. Euro RSCG Chicago
17. Sundance Vacations
18. SUA Insurance Company
19. Impact Networking, LLC
20. Kovitz Shifrin Nesbit

Large Companies

(250 or more Employees)

1. Drafftcb
2. Redbox Automated Retail, LLC
3. Edward Jones
4. TheComprehensiveGroup
5. ATI Physical Therapy
6. Rush-Copley Medical Center
7. Advocate Health and Hospital Corp.
8. Quest Diagnostics
9. Delnor Health System
10. Comcast

Event Highlights



The Comprehensive Group, fourth-ranked in the large company division of "Best Places To Work in Illinois," delivers rehabilitation-related services through a variety of organizations.



Radio Flyer employees, whose Chicago-based company is world famous for its red wagons, celebrate the firm's fourth place ranking among the "Best Places To Work" in the mid-sized division.



Fifth place in the mid-sized category of "Best Places To Work" goes to Assurance, a Schaumburg-based insurance brokerage. (Photos by Dietrich Wolfram)

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Mid-Sized
Company

Radio Flyer

Well-known Radio Flyer is the leading producer of wagons and tricycles in the United States.



In line with its recreational focus, the company promotes activities for its 53 member staff, such as tricycle races, Wii Olympics and an indoor walking track. Also, Radio Flyer offers reimbursement for a variety of healthy activities, including on-site diet counseling and local fitness center membership.

But at the heart of the company is a focus on culture and a commitment to open communication, said Robert Pasin, company president and CEO.

"Being a Best Place to Work is an outcome of living our values and selecting people who live our values," said Pasin. "In a midsize organization, the impact one employee can have on the overall business is even more direct in good times or bad. It is because of the impact each person personally has on the business that selection is always one of the most important things we do. It is critical that we find the right match between the person, the position and the culture."

And while the company values communicating with its employees, it also puts emphasis on being open to feedback.

"It is and has always been important to create a culture where people thrive, and it is important to provide the resources, tools and environment to do so," Pasin said. "This includes creating an environment where it can be shared openly, where it is heard and appropriately responded to and actions result from the feedback. People and organizations continue to learn and grow in this type of an environment."

"We put a lot of thought into the messages we communicate to employees and we hold ourselves accountable to delivering on what we say. We want to continue to be a part of an authentic community at work and believe that comes through honest, open and on-going communication... it is how we live."

Also key to the company's ongoing success has been a commitment to education and training.

"We want to continue to build a learning organization and invest in people so that our employees can reinvent themselves, and our workforce continues to reinvent our business," Pasin said.

Quick Facts

Radio Flyer

6515 W. Grand Ave., Chicago 60707

www.radioflyer.com

Industry: Manufacturing/consumer products

Number of employees: 53

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Mid-Sized
Company

Assurance

Assurance may be one of the larger insurance brokerages in the United States, but in-house, it is a close-knit community.



"We all passionately believe that Assurance is an incredible company with a corporate culture that deserves to be recognized, highlighted, and just plain celebrated," said Lisa Pinion, Assurance executive.

To inspire revenue growth and attract talent, performance-based bonuses are awarded at every employment level. The company covers in full the benefits of vision, life and disability insurance, and shares the costs of medical and prescription drug coverage, continually evaluating plan designs to best fit the needs of its staff.

"At Assurance, we place an intense emphasis on caring for our employees and making 'work' a place people enjoy spending their time," Pinion said. "We recognize and respect a balance in work and personal lives. And we have very deliberate efforts to support that balance."

Many employees enjoy the flexibility of telecommuting, and some even are employed

from other states. But for those in house, there is an on-site health club, paid health screenings, on-site massages and fitness classes, and even a Wii gaming system for employees to use at their leisure. In fact, it is a corporate culture which boasts fun and camaraderie that has become Assurance's differentiating factor.

"We are a contemporary and energized organization with a sense of humor," Pinion said. "From our Intranet's 'Quote of the Day' consisting of obscure song lyrics or movie quotes, to cross-town rivalry days uncovering true Cubs and Sox fans, we definitely show we know how to have fun!"

"Most importantly, we believe a happy and motivated workforce helps lead us to our ultimate goal of providing superior service to our clients," she said. "The company doesn't actually ever touch any client—only individuals do. So when we put our employees first, we know they will put our clients first."

Quick Facts

Assurance

One Century Centre, 1750 E. Golf Road,

Schaumburg 60173

www.assuranceagency.com

Industry: Insurance

Number of employees: 203

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