



What makes a company a Best Place to Work in St. Louis?

If you look at the question from a purely technical standpoint, the Business Journal's annual Best Places to Work finalists and winners are determined based on the scores of anonymous employee surveys given by Quantum Workplace. That's it.

But how do companies score well?

They need highly engaged employees who enjoy their workplace. That leads to the more relevant question: What do the companies recognized in this section do to achieve that result?

Some companies have a bag full of different benefits at their disposal. In this issue, you'll read about flashy perks such as the use of vacation homes, paid Caribbean trips and large cash bonuses.

There are also subtler things such as flexible schedules, the freedom to work from home and tuition reimbursements.

That's still only half the story.

If you want to get at the core of what makes these workplaces enjoyable, check out the guiding principle at finalist Connectria Corp.: No jerks allowed.

Workplace environments are a major factor on employee productivity and morale.

The Best Places to Work finalists and winners have strong leaders who know how to empower employees. They have supportive co-workers who do their jobs, pitch in to help when needed and don't leave others holding the bag. There's an overall atmosphere that fosters teamwork. There's good communication.

If you're trying to build your company into a Best Place to Work, and who isn't, don't focus solely on quantifiable benefits. At the end of the day, enjoying where you work still largely comes down to enjoying who you work with.

- Rob Hurtt, section editor

MEDIUM COMPANIES

FINALISTS Connectria Corp.

No jerks allowed. That's the line in Connectria Corp.'s guiding principles that employees mention most when asked why the company is a good place to work.

"It's subjective, but everyone knows what a jerk is," said President and CEO Rich Waidmann, who owns the \$20 million company along with Senior Vice President Eric Miller. "Just posting that tends to attract the right people."

Connectria offers managed hosting, remote management, disaster recovery and IT consulting. It employs about 80 in St. Louis and three in Philadelphia, and Waidmann said the company is still growing. It expects to hire five to 10 employees a year.

Everyone's opinion is heard, and employees are treated like grownups, said Office Manager Donna Boevingloh. "This is one place where all the good stuff came together," she said.

"The pay is great and benefits are fantastic, but in general it's the way everyone is," said David Pollard, account manager at Connectria. "People respect each other."

Connectria puts 3 percent of an employee's salary into a 401(k), whether or not the employee contributes. The company pays employees' medical and dental coverage, short-term and long-term disability insurance, and life insurance equal to one year's pay. Connectria pays 50 percent of dependents' medical and dental coverage. The



Connectria employees enjoy working together thanks to one of the firm's guiding principles: "No jerks allowed."

company picked up recent premium increases of 10 percent for medical premiums and 4 percent for dental rather than pass it on to employees.

The company provides soft drinks, juice and fruit. Monthly parties celebrate employment anniversaries and birthdays, and Connectria hosts an annual year-end party in January for employees and spouses at Saratoga Lanes.

PERKS:

- Employees receive a \$200 annual allowance for optional corporate-logoed apparel.
- Connectria installed a fitness center at its Creve Coeur headquarters and is working to place fitness equipment at its data center downtown.
- Cards and Blues tickets are doled out regularly.

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