

# The Best Place to Work

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*"I want our church to be the best place in the world to work. What do I have to do?"* Wow – a big question, requiring a much bigger answer than the \$4:50 coffee the pastor sitting opposite me had just provided. *"How do you attract your staff? And what do you do to keep them?"* From leading a theological College for many years with the most amazing staff team, here are a few of my suggestions:

## Have clear vision and purpose

The best workplace will make it very clear to staff why the organisation exists. People will be able to easily articulate what the big purpose is and how it is to be achieved. My staff had greater ownership, motivation, and longevity when they appreciated what they were contributing to and how they were making a difference. Well-defined vision and direction also helped my employees set more meaningful personal work goals, resulting in more meaningful results to celebrate with them.

*Can your staff articulate what their workplace is wanting to achieve, why it is important, and how it will be done?*

## Communicate often

The best workplace will keep the staff informed. One of the more effective things I did in my role as Principal was initiate a weekly e-mail that went to staff and Board members each Friday afternoon. I believe that its personal and humorous style contributed significantly to developing a healthy place to work. With headings such as thank you, news, key-dates, governance news, prayer, Charles' personal news, and photo-of-the-week, people felt valued and informed – there were no secrets or surprises.

*How and what do you communicate to your staff team?*

## Require accountability

The best workplace will provide encouraging and honest feedback. In my experience employees like the opportunity to discuss with a supervisor how they are performing. They appreciate receiving feedback on what they are doing well, and what might require improvement. Unfortunately, many Christian organisations are weak in this area with basic things like annual reviews often being ignored. My motivated staff would often ask me how they could perform better not only now, but how they might be able to develop for future roles.

*When do your staff receive feedback from you or their supervisor?*

## Provide a safe place to dream

The best place to work will encourage creative thinking amongst staff and provide safe places for people to articulate their ideas – regardless of how crazy they might be! I liked the idea of placing a 'soap-box' in the middle of our meeting room. Staff had the opportunity to stand up and share their ideas and even rant for a minute or two on how things might be different. For me, staff being innovative in the workplace, even if it resulted in failure, didn't worry me. However, staff being unimaginative and frightened of making a mistake concerned me greatly, forcing me to look at how I was leading.

*Is your workplace a safe environment to share new ideas? When? How is this done?*

## Meet regularly

In the best workplace meeting with staff occurs habitually. As employers, when someone or something more important comes along and we postpone gathering, the message we portray to staff is quite clear – you and your work are not the priority and something else is more important. A friend of mine introduced me to the idea of 'stand-up' meetings. Almost daily I would walk around our campus and enter staff members offices – standing, without sitting down. Within a short time I could engage with people at both a professional and personal level. A workplace where staff have precedence will be the best.

*What priority do you give to just stopping and having a conversation with your staff? How often do you postpone meetings with people?*

### Develop a strong team

I believe the best workplaces will be marked out by a strong sense of team. People like to belong to communities where they are valued and can contribute. And again, collegiality doesn't just happen – it takes a lot of hard work. For me it meant such things as: investing creatively and financially in staff retreats with team-building days, having an expectation that staff attend morning tea, creating projects that forced people to work together, deciding not to employ the person with the most skill but little character, proactively speaking with staff members who choose not to be present, making sure academics and administrative staff looked out for each other, and asking people not to work from home. Hard for me to do – but you should see the results!

*How do you know your staff feel like they belong?*

### Provide a positive physical environment

I believe that the best place to work will have a physical environment that is attractive and engaging. Not only does it show employees they are valued, but an inviting atmosphere will positively influence the way people feel and behave. Have a look at your workplace – the paintwork, the staffroom, the furniture, the toilets, the layout, the natural light and air, and so on. How tidy are things? Would you be proud to show this setting off to your family and friends?

*What physical changes do you need to make to your workplace?*

### Have plenty of fun

I believe that the best place to work will be marked out by lots of laughter. And this doesn't just happen either – it takes real effort. Plan fun events. Lighten up the staffroom. Eat together often. Celebrate birthdays. Do some teambuilding. Challenge the competition. Put effort into the Christmas party. Applaud the successes. Have the ability to laugh publicly at yourself and to not take things too seriously. So closely connected to this is being a place of work where people can cry with one another. I have a feeling that my staff appreciated their workplace the most when they were supported in the tough times, and when the hard anniversaries were remembered.

*How do you include fun times within your workplace calendar?*

### Genuinely care for people

I believe the best workplace will have a boss that is interested not only in what staff can do for them, but also in who they are as people. They will take an interest in my family. They will think about my long-term career. Know my interests and my battles. They will remember those important dates. Am I able to pay the bills? And how my self-care is coming along. Hard work? Yes – but you did say you wanted to be the best work place!

*How do your staff know that you care for them?*

### Expect professional development

The best workplace will be made up of staff members who are active life-long learners. Professional development energises people with fresh ideas, introduces them to new people and networks, opens up new ways of thinking and doing, keeps them current in their thinking and practice, and brings a deeper level of accountability. Investing in the development of staff not only creates a vibrant and cutting-edge workplace but it results in people feeling valued – and being a lot less boring too!

*How much investment do you make into the education of your staff team?*

### Remember it is God's work

I believe the best workplace will be marked out by prayer – for one another and for the mission of the ministry. It is motivational and empowering for staff to be reminded of whose work they are doing. I want to be working for God and seeing his Kingdom established – now that is worth getting out of bed for in the mornings! I want my workplace to have absolute reliance and dependence upon God. And remember to be creative with prayer – it doesn't have to be meeting together at 6am on a Saturday morning!

*How often do you pray with your staff team?*

## Share the limelight

The best workplace will enable all staff to take the limelight. The boss won't be precious about needing to be the one who chairs the meeting, presents the report, speaks publicly, or has their name attached to the new idea. Rather they will proactively push staff forward and look for ways to allow them to shine. I recently read, *"A classic sign of a bad boss is someone who takes all the credit when things go well for their team, but deflects criticism onto others when results are less positive."*

*When was the last time you stepped back so a staff member received all the attention?*