



## *Human Resources At Its Best*

I just attended the first annual Workplace Excellence Awards presented by the San Diego Society for Human Resource Management. I was immediately impressed by both the size of the turnout and the level of enthusiasm of attendees. In light of today's intense "people pressures" it is abundantly clear that the role of human resource executive is taking on new meaning. What I would like to do is go over some of the comments shared by the award winners as well as my reflections on them.

### **Small Business Award Winner (1-99 Employees)**

*Cooper Iverson Marketing*

This company has 18 employees and helps market technology companies. Here's what they had to say:

- **Flexibility** – There is no punching the clock at Cooper Iverson. This is a prime example of having a trustworthy culture. In a trustworthy working environment people are more concerned about how they can add value than how they can get away with doing as little as possible. It is the character or culture of an organization that provides the checks and balances on the entire notion of flexibility.
- **Everyone is involved in the company's policies and procedures** – From what I can tell there really is no separation when it comes to how to manage vs. being managed. The reality is that this is one continuum. I often suggest that my clients involve their employees in the development of policies and procedures so that they in a sense "own" them. One example of this ownership is conducting an "employee smell test" for approval of an employee handbook or individual policy. Before going final on that policy or procedure simply ask a select group of the workforce about what they like, what they don't like and perhaps things could be done differently or better.
- **They don't have sick days** – Instead they have "mountain days". The CEO is quick enough to acknowledge that some days people just need a "break." Rather than have them lie to get one, she relies on the employee's integrity as to when they really need one. In light of the recent statistic published by CCH that 74% of all people who claim they are sick are not in fact sick, this policy rings of brilliance to me.
- **40% of the company's profits are shared** – The profits are distributed amongst the workforce on a quarterly basis. Whether used formalistic profit sharing programs or simply issue frequent bonuses, there is no substitute for allowing people to share in the upside.

- **Employees maintain a balanced workload** – This is critically important when building teamwork. No one person’s responsibilities should be out of balance. Everyone should be able to get their job done and leave at approximately the same time everyday. So, if you find that one of your managers or employees is pulling 60 hr. workweeks you should be asking yourself how can we balance their workload.
- **There are no hidden agendas** – When you have a trustworthy culture, this can be the case. When the company’s integrity is in tact, people can feel free to engage in radical honesty and “tell it like it is.” This is critically important in today’s successful workplace.
- **“We genuinely care about each other”** – Isn’t this a company that you would like to work for?

### **Medium Sized Company (100-500)**

#### *North Island Federal Credit Union*

As the title suggests, this is a credit union with 320 employees but as we shall soon see, no ordinary one.

- **It’s all about our corporate culture** – This is a theme that was reiterated throughout the day’s program. North Island has:
  1. Acknowledged the critical importance of corporate culture
  2. Taken the time to define what it is
  3. Makes an effort to reinforce and reward that culture.
- **Culture Defined** – The executives at North Island used such words as reward, nurture, challenge, accountability, responsibility, people first, and so on.
- What distinguishes North Island from many other companies is that they not only speak these words but they “operationalize” them.
- **“We are great believers in wellness”** – So much so that they have a massage therapist come on site every Wednesday.
- **We solicit employee referrals** – Another common theme throughout the day is that the very best companies rely on their existing employees in the recruitment process. I would encourage employers to take this even one step further and actually involve future co-workers in the interviewing process as well. I have created a Co-Employee Applicant Appraisal form, which I will send you e-mail me at [don@croforum.com](mailto:don@croforum.com)
- **Career Development** – This is a very powerful retention strategy. Very often most companies do a very poor job of figuring out where an employee should be in two or three year’s time. What is their natural progression through your organization?
- **“I am valued”** – As the VP of HR stated, this is the main reason why she remains a loyal and committed executive. She stated that, “at North Island employees work for themselves.”

## **Large Company (500+)**

### *Ericsson Wireless Communications*

A number of years ago Ericsson, a Swedish company, purchased a local San Diego company. According to their Vice President of HR, HR is woven into all aspects of company business.

- **Balanced scorecard** – The company benchmarks its HR progress. Since there are literally dozens of different programs that HR can manage at a company it is important to keep the balance right.
- **Diversity** – Ericsson described itself as the United Nations of telecommunications. Ericsson has been able to foster their culture in more than 140 different countries. They succeed because of their diversity, not despite it.
- **An exciting place to work** – The term “exciting” was used on numerous occasions. Very simply, they make sure that their employees are excited about going to work everyday. Are yours? Are you?
- **Lifelong learning** – This is an approach they take towards training. It is the only approach to take with training.
- **Recreational activities** – Whether it is a lunchtime volleyball game or one of their outbound retreats, Ericsson realizes that recreational activities instill a sense of teamwork and cohesiveness. When I conduct company surveys, it is often telling to see how many employees would be interested in a company softball team, bowling team, investment club, or community based activities. If they’re interested, help them do it.

## **Grand Awards Winner**

### *The Four Seasons Resort Aviara*

The Four Seasons reputation is well deserved. They, like many other excellent companies realize that in order to provide outstanding customer service, you first have to build outstanding employee relations.

- **Follow the Golden Rule** – This is their mantra. My only cautionary note is that depending on a person’s viewpoint, you may not want them treating other people the way they would want to be treated, especially if they have low self-esteem. Better to define your version of the Golden Rule. P.S. [Click here](#) to see mine.
- **Extended employee selection and orientation process** – I felt no sense of panic when it came to hiring excellent employees. Many companies I have met with feel that hiring anybody today is better than hiring the best down the road. They also realize that orientation is not an event, but rather a process that can take months.
- **Quarterly all employee meetings** – apparently their HR department coordinates an all hands meeting complete with PowerPoint Presentations, light shows and music three to four times a year. The importance of this type

of an event cannot be understated. Having studied a number of successful network marketing companies, I can tell you that the very best of them all have an all member meeting at least on a quarterly basis. While you may not have the ability to put on a multimedia show, there is simply no substitute for having an all hands meeting at least once per quarter.

- **Complimentary room and meal program** – Every employee is entitled to treat their family to a complimentary room and also eat the same five star foods as the customers do. The Four Seasons realizes that there is no substitute for the employees becoming intimately familiar with their product from the consumer standpoint. I have been in organizations where the employees have never once utilized the products or service sold on a daily basis. This creates an incredible disconnect between employee and customer.
- **This type of culture takes years to develop** – Perhaps this is fitting as the final point in the program. The general manager of the resort said that it is very hard to copy their values, culture and ethics, in that it takes years to develop. The fact is excellence does not come easily. Fortunately, the results are well worth the effort.

## Conclusion

I think we are getting to a point where there is less and less information to share regarding creating excellence in the workplace. We know what we should do, the question is do we have the strategies, tools, motivation and support to go about doing it. Today's savvy business owner or manager realizes that the human resource function is shifting from an administrative to strategic one. This is an exciting time for a partnership between the CEO, Board and human resources function.

I hope this summary acts as both a refresher and both a motivator to continue making positive changes in your workplace. If you have any special programs you have implemented at your company that you would like me to share with my readership please e-mail me at [don@croforum.com](mailto:don@croforum.com) or give me a call at (800) 234-3304.

All the best,



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