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ARGUMENT

# 'Community' Outreach

Research into more than half a million employee responses to Great Place to Work's global survey finds that camaraderie is central to what makes the world's best workplaces so great.

BY ED FRAUENHEIM





**W**hen technology giant Cisco Systems Inc. promoted Chuck Robbins to the CEO post in May 2015, the move wasn't a quiet celebration confined to the C-suite.

No. The global company of some 70,000 employees came together and partied.

The data-networking specialist held what it called "Cisco Rocks" events around the world. These began with a July 27 concert for 30,000 employees and their guests at Levi's Stadium, the state-of-the-art home of the San Francisco 49ers football team. The event honored former CEO and current chairman John Chambers, and included performances from pop star Christina Aguilera and country star Keith Urban.

Then, over the next four days, Cisco threw 46 more parties in locations ranging from Foxboro, Massachusetts, to Bangalore, India, to Beijing — each featuring music, food and drink, games and live entertainment.



When Chuck Robbins took over as CEO, Cisco Systems hosted a series of huge events, including a concert at Levi's Stadium.

Fifty thousand people celebrated together at their local sites.

Here's what one employee said after the Cisco Rocks Santa Clara event: "Seeing Christina perform was obviously great, but just hanging out with colleagues in a venue like this has been amazing!"

It might seem Pollyannaish to think employees want a festive, inclusive sense of camaraderie — similar to the Cisco Rocks events — more than they want individual benefits. And to be sure, employees care about their paychecks, personalized professional development plans and unique, customized perks. But these sorts of solo rewards were not as critical as social workplace features in a study of 507,392 employees at the 25 Best Multinational Workplaces by the Great Place to Work Institute. (Editor's note: Ed Frauenheim is a former *Workforce* senior editor and currently works for the institute.)

An analysis of employee survey responses across 47 countries found that people at Great Place's 25 World's Best list—including Cisco — cherish the ways their companies act as "communities." Companies the world over would do well to focus on this driver of workplace greatness as well as on the trusting relationships that are the foundation of a strong culture. That's not just for the benefit of employees but also for the business benefits that come from a high-trust workplace. A growing mound of evidence from Great Place to Work and other experts shows that a great culture pays off in areas ranging from higher revenue to lower turnover to better stock market performance to superb customer service.

### Broader Trends Related to Community

Our study examined which of the Great Place to Work Trust Index survey statements best predicted employees' response to the overall statement, "Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work." (There are 58 statements in all.) Six of the top 15 drivers of workplace greatness at the World's Best indicate a fun, egalitarian community is key to what makes the world's top employers great.

The notion that a sense of community drives workplace greatness at the World's Best makes sense in light of a number of social and economic trends affecting the global landscape. One of these is the millennial generation's highly social character. Consider this finding from a 2013 global study of the younger generation by consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, the University of Southern California and the London Business School: "Millennials place a high priority on workplace culture and desire a work environment that emphasizes teamwork and a sense of community."

The kind of community linked to a great workplace at the World's Best is a fundamentally fair one — one that's inclusive to people of all ages. This feature fits the way the millennial generation can feel unfairly maligned as well as the way older employees can fear they will be discriminated against even as they want



## Top 10 Workplace Greatness Drivers

Great Place to Work conducted a statistical analysis to determine the strongest drivers of overall workplace greatness at the World's Best Multinational Workplaces. That is, Great Place examined which of its Trust Index survey statements (there are 58 in total) best predicted employees' response to the overall statement, "Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work."

1. I want to work here for a long time.
2. This is a fun place to work.
3. I am given the resources and equipment to do my job.
4. People look forward to coming to work here.
5. I am treated as a full member here regardless of my position.
6. Management does a good job of assigning and coordinating people.
7. You can count on people to cooperate.
8. This is a physically safe place to work.
9. Management shows appreciation for good work and extra effort.
10. Management trusts people to do a good job without watching over their shoulders.

—Ed Frauenheim



# How to Build a Great Global Culture

**(Hint: It doesn't have to break the bank.)**

Based on Great Place to Work research into the drivers of workplace greatness at the World's Best Multinational Workplaces, here are several actions to take ... and avoid. The good news is that building a great global culture doesn't have to cost a lot.

**Do:** Cultivate community. Great Place research suggests global organizations should seek to foster a festive, inclusive, welcoming, collaborative and familylike workplace. The message is that employees thrive when their team is friendly, fair and fun.

**Do not:** Lose sight of the group by focusing too much on the individual. Organizations that only pay attention to individual benefits or rewards — especially those that pit employees against each other — actually may fail to bring out the best in individuals.

**Do:** Set clear strategies and organize teams smartly. Employees want to see that leaders have a vision and plans to achieve it. They also care about effective use of talent.

**Do not:** Micromanage. Providing a measure of autonomy is vital to motivating employees.

**Do:** Get the basics right. Make safe work conditions and proper equipment a priority.

**Do not:** Chain employees to work. People want to work hard, but they need to be able to take breaks without fearing for their jobs.

—Ed Frauenheim

or need to remain in the workforce.

The way increasing amounts of work are done collaboratively also helps explain the importance of camaraderie and community among the World's Best. When people know and enjoy their colleagues, joint projects tend to be done with greater ease and satisfaction.

A word about a “fun” workplace. While we called out Cisco's series of global celebrations as an example of a playful company culture, it would be simplistic to think that holding lots of parties makes a workplace fun. When people experience their culture as fun, “fun” activities typically are the tip of an iceberg made up of positive relationships and healthy workplace practices.

A fun culture is fun because people have the time and space to take a break at work, senior leaders participate in the activities and model the way, and people are generally

positive about the future of the organization and not worried about losing their jobs. There may be friendly sports competitions among internal groups or team lunches at local restaurants. Employees also may have chances to contribute new ideas or participate in innovation contests. In sum, the culture of the workplace values people and relationships.

Consider Cisco, which has cut jobs in recent years. But the Cisco Rocks events of the past year came in the context of a company that has adopted flexible work arrangements, that is offering mindfulness programs at work to boost employee well-being and that is increasing skills training for staffers.

At the same time, Cisco has continued to stay on the cutting edge — with Boston Consulting Group recently naming the company the 14th most innovative company in the world. And 86 percent of employees in the 12 countries in which Great Place recognized Cisco as a Great Workplace say that “people care about each other here.”

“They say good people are valued,” one Cisco employee in the United Kingdom told Great Place. “I feel like a treasure at Cisco!”

In this kind of highly personal, high-performance climate, the kind of companywide, global celebration seen in the Cisco Rocks event becomes the cherry on top of a sundae of workplace fun. It reinforces and caps off an enjoyable culture made up of many positive elements.

Workplace bonds also may be important at the World's Best in part because of the atomization of society in many parts of the globe. In other words, a sense of community at work may be of growing value to people as traditional family and community ties fray.

Economic ties at many companies also are disintegrating. Organizations throughout the globe have been dismantling traditional employer-employee relationships in favor of temporary contractor arrangements. The shift to what is sometimes called the “gig economy” is driven largely by a desire to cut costs and increase agility.

But there are questions about whether it is wise for companies to distance themselves from their labor force, including their extended, contingent workforce. And research indicates that social cohesiveness among co-workers boosts employee happiness and effectiveness. Adam Grant, management professor at the University of Pennsylvania and author of “Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success,” noted in a recent New York Times article that research shows that groups of friends outperform groups of acquaintances in both decision-making and effort tasks.

“When friends work together, they're more trusting and committed to one another's success,” Grant wrote. “That means they share more information and spend more time helping — and as long as they don't hold back on con-

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structive criticism out of politeness, they make better choices and get more done.”

As this comment suggests, company communities that are friendly, fair and fun not only fuel employee perceptions that their workplace is great, but also foster better business results.

Take No. 1-ranked Google Inc. The tech giant has topped Great Place’s global list for three straight years, and ranked as the No. 1 desirable employer for engineering and business students globally in a recent study by consulting firm Universum Global. Google enjoys the fourth-highest market capitalization in the world, and the nearly 20-year-old company continues to enjoy soaring sales. Google reported 2014 revenue of \$66 billion, up 19 percent year over year.

Google is not alone. Company after

company on the list of 25 is at or near the top of their industries, from top-ranked Google to professional services giant EY to hospitality companies Marriott International Inc., Hyatt Hotels Corp. and Accor-Hotels, to retailer H&M.

Collectively, the 2015 World’s Best already are changing the world. They are the vanguard of a more hopeful economic era defined by great workplaces for all.

Consider the reaction of another Cisco employee to its Cisco Rocks event in San Jose: “Beyond EPIC @cisco day today. #NewCEO & new day for an amazing place to work! Thanks for the fun!”

In other words, party on. *wf*

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