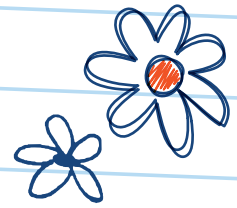


**CREATE AN
EMPLOYEE
EXPERIENCE
THEY'LL**

LOVE.

3 Stories from America's Best Places to Work

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jamee Kugler

Jamee does all things marketing for the Best Places to Work program. She has almost a decade of marketing experience, and a serious passion for finding and celebrating awesome workplace cultures. If you've ever received a Best Places to Work email, ebook, or newsletter, it's most likely Jamee's doing. She loves running, traveling, and animals, and dreams of owning a pet hedgehog one day.



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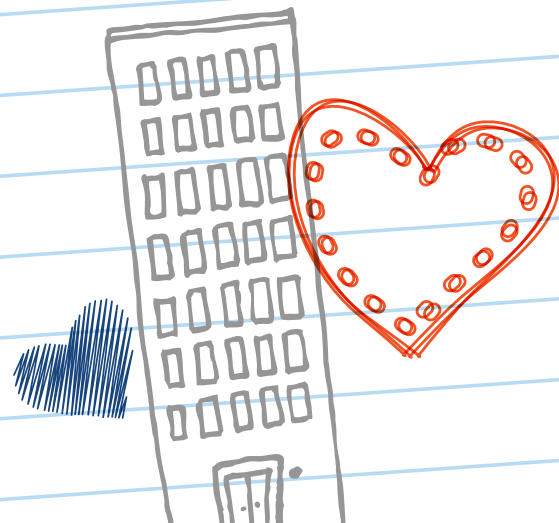
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INTRODUCTION



So, why these three companies?

It's not easy to become one of the Best Places to Work in your city. It takes dedication to the people who make your work function - the employees. It takes leaders who are truly committed to creating an awesome workplace.

This ebook features three companies that have been named a Best Place to Work many, many times in their cities. Each of them went about this in different ways, but they all have one thing in common: they are passionate about their employees. Keep reading to find out how each of these three companies changed their culture for the better and why they are consistently named Best Places to Work in their respective cities.



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QUANTUM
WORKPLACE

1

CASE STUDY 1

Farm Credit Services of America has been on the Best Places to Work in Omaha list 10 times (!) since 2003. In the company's most recent survey, 94 percent of employees said they would like to be working at the company one year from today. Keep reading to find out why.





Farm Credit Services of America

Farm Credit Services of America Stays at the Top With a Clearly-Defined Culture, Trusted Leaders, a Devotion to their Community, and More

Farm Credit Services of America is a company doing a lot of awesome things. For starters, it's been named one of the Best Places to Work in Omaha seven times since the program began in 2003. On top of that, it received the Sustained Excellence Award from 2010 through 2012, which is given to companies that consistently are on the Best Places to Work in Omaha list.

So what exactly is the company doing?

Farm Credit Services of America has a distinct, clearly-defined culture that its employees are excited to discuss. This was obvious when we spoke with Lynette Campbell, Vice President of Organizational Development and Learning, and Kurt Kline, Vice President of Human Resources. Their passion for the company was palpable. "We're really serious about our culture and the words that we use, as well our purpose," said Lynette. "We aspire to be a company that people don't want to leave."

In 2010, Farm Credit Services of America started working on a project that aimed to put its unique culture into words. What they came up with were seven "we are" statements including, we are leaders, we are teammates, we are adaptable, we are innovators, we are experts, we are values driven, and we are servants. "The 'we are' statements are really the bedrock of our culture," Kurt said. Each year in the company's annual engagement survey, Farm Credit Services asks specific questions to make sure the "we are" statements still ring true for employees.

On the next few pages are four key reasons Farm Credit Services is consistently named one of the Best Places to Work in Omaha.



1. Trust in Senior Leaders

Farm Credit Services scored highly in the area of Trust in Senior Leaders on its most recent Best Places to Work survey. In fact, Trust in Senior Leaders outscored Trust with Coworkers and Manager Effectiveness by more than 5 percent, which is rare, as we usually see the opposite. Lynette said this is due to the transparency of the leaders. "I believe [employees] trust that they're being looked out for and that the leadership has good intentions, and there's no hidden agenda," she said. "When we do have to make difficult decisions, we're really honest about them."

Kurt said he believes the high Trust in Senior Leaders score is due to the way leaders behave, as well as their accessibility. "If anybody wants to go talk to the CEO, they can. There's no one guarding his door; it's usually open. [Our senior leaders] don't have perks. They don't have front-row parking stalls. They are treated like everybody else. They are teammates. That goes from the physical structure of our building to the way they treat and respect others. They're not 'look at me' people. They're not arrogant. They're just great teammates who take on significant amounts of responsibility."



2. Cross-Functional Teams

Outside companies, reporters, and even competitors have all noticed that there's something unique about the culture at Farm Credit Services. On a monthly basis, the company is asked to give interviews, tours, and presentations.

"People are interested in us because we seem to have found the secret sauce," Kurt said.

Part of that secret sauce involves cross-functional teams. At any given time, Farm Credit Services has approximately 40 to 50 cross-functional teams, or teams made up of volunteers from multiple departments, to make decisions and problem solve. The teams tackle projects such as the use of office space, diversity and inclusion programs, and employee well-being strategies.

"Cross-functional teams are one of the absolute strengths of this organization that get us to both culture and business results that we have," Kurt noted. "We invite people from all over the organization – finance, HR, facilities, leadership – to help us get to the right solutions. The power of that is bringing in diversity of thought and getting buy in. It's a little slower, it's a little harder, but we believe it gets us to the best outcome."



3. Philanthropy

Another thing that's critical to engagement at Farm Credit Services is connecting employees to a sense of purpose. "We really feel great about our customers and our purpose," Kurt said. "We know we're not saving the world. But in our little corner, we are doing great work and helping customers who feed the world."

Because they're an agricultural lending company, Farm Credit Services focuses most of its philanthropic efforts on food and alleviating hunger. Each employee is given personal volunteer hours and encouraged to get involved within the community.

"It gives me chills to think about how much we do to alleviate hunger in the world," Kurt said. "I believe our employees donated more than \$70,000 to food banks last year. And we do a lot of volunteer work." In fact, each team at Farm Credit Services schedules one volunteer activity per year and is given \$1,000 to donate to a nonprofit organization of its choice.



4. Taking Care of Employees

Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin, famously said, "If you look after your staff, they'll look after your customers." Farm Credit Services seems to get that. Not only do they offer developmental learning opportunities designed to help employees become better at their jobs, but they also offer courses designed to help employees become better people. The classes help employees learn how to reduce stress, manage personal finances, and more.

This is something Lynette's so passionate about that she got choked up while talking about it. "We've had people come up to us and say, 'What I learned here helped me become a better person, and my family has noticed,'" Lynette said. "Or 'This class saved my marriage. We were on different wavelengths about our finances, and now we have life insurance for the first time ever.' Or 'This class helped us learn how to get out of debt.' These are moments in time where you feel like you're making a true difference in your career."

"We're in a really positive, virtuous circle," Kurt added. "Whether we're talking about our employees or Farm Credit Services of America, it's always bigger than us. We're just making sure we're doing our part."



2

CASE STUDY 2

Baker Donelson was founded in 1888 as a small law firm in Huntsville, Tennessee. It was known as a place where clients would drop by for a glass of iced tea and good conversation. By the late 2000s, the company had grown to one of the largest law firms in the Southeast United States.

As the company rapidly expanded, Baker Donelson's leaders realized they were going to have to make drastic changes if they wanted to keep the familial culture clients had grown to love and expect. Keep reading to find out how they did it.

BAKER DONELSON



Baker Donelson

How Baker Donelson changed its culture in five minutes.

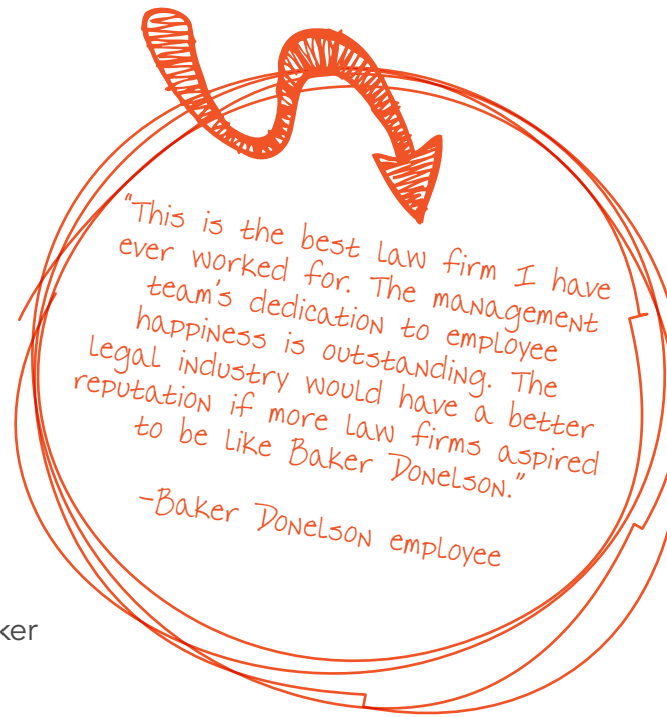
In the early 2000s, law firm Baker Donelson faced a major challenge.

When it was founded in 1888 in Huntsville, Tennessee, Baker Donelson was known as the type of place where clients would drop by for coffee or a glass of iced tea and good conversation. The firm prided itself on making people feel welcome.

Fast forward to 2007. Baker Donelson had 14 locations and was one of the largest law firms based in the Southeast United States. Although the company was clearly successful, company leaders feared if it continued to grow, they would lose the familial feel clients and employees had grown to love and expect.

The firm's leaders decided to make immediate changes. They halted growth for a period of time and began formulating a way to articulate their company values and put them into action.

"A lot of times, values and mission statements are written, brought out for the initial roll-out, tacked on the employee lounge wall, and then forgotten," said Internal Communications Manager Liz McKee. "We wanted to make sure that didn't happen. We wanted to make sure our clients experienced the same level of service and felt the same Baker Donelson experience in Washington, D.C. as they did in Johnson City, Tennessee."



To do this, Baker Donelson's leaders brought together a group of approximately 35 employees that included representatives from every office and every role in the company, from executive to receptionist. Together, the group drafted what is known today as the 12 Standards of Excellence.

"Our 12 Standards of Excellence are essentially our values in action," Liz said. "They cover everything from community service to giving and receiving feedback."

The initiative didn't stop there. To make sure the values were being lived out, the firm implemented the Daily Docket, which is a daily, five-minute meeting that occurs at each of the company's 19 offices.

The meetings are dedicated to improving client service, Liz said, but have also drastically improved coworker camaraderie.

"Before this initiative started, it was very easy to sit in your office and never see anyone. Never have a face-to-face conversation with a coworker. These five-minute meetings allow people to see each other face to face. To get to know about each other's families and successes." Stronger teams, Liz said, lead to better service, internally and externally.

The meetings vary each day, but always revolve around one of the firm's 12 Standards of Excellence. Some leaders inject their personal touches, such as trivia or another fun element, and the meetings close with a quote of the day. The only rules are that the meetings start on time, end on time, and conclude in less than 10 minutes.



"The Daily Docket has really become a way to solidify our 'one firm' value," Liz said. "Because everybody in the entire firm is talking about the same thing each day. You can talk to your coworker in New Orleans or Atlanta or wherever you are and have some common ground."

Clearly the initiative is working. Since the 12 Standards of Excellence were released in 2008, overall company engagement at Baker Donelson has increased, and the company consistently makes Best Places to Work lists all over the U.S. Additionally, Baker Donelson's Trust with Coworkers and Teamwork scores have risen significantly since the Daily Docket initiative began that same year. The company has also been named one of Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For six years in a row.

The consistently positive scores aren't surprising to Liz. "We just have a really caring culture," she said. "Whether someone is experiencing the worst time in their lives or the best time, it doesn't matter what office you walk into; there are people rallying around one another."



3

CASE STUDY 3

In 2009, Chili's was struggling. The economy was crumbling, people weren't eating out as much, and employees were growing weary. Leaders knew a drastic change was needed. Keep reading to find out how company leaders rebuilt the culture from the inside out and saved the Chili's brand.





Chili's

How an icon of casual dining changed its culture and saved the company.

It was 2009. Casual dining and the restaurant industry in general were evolving. New "fast casual" players had entered the market and competition was growing. The economy was crumbling, and the housing crisis was just beginning. With less disposable income in their pockets, Americans were dining out less.

Brinker International, the company that owns major restaurant brands Chili's and Maggiano's Little Italy, was struggling. Wall Street was losing interest. Their board of directors was losing faith. And the company wasn't delivering results.

Leaders at Chili's knew a drastic change was needed. "Our culture was starting to work against us. We had to face the fact that we were accountable for these results," said Chris Ebbeler, Senior Manager of Workplace Community at Chili's. "We couldn't blame the weather or the economy; we had to take ownership and work together cross functionally to do the hard work that it would take to turn the brand around."

That same year, Chili's gathered company leaders for a leadership conference, which was intentionally named "Power Shift."



"Power Shift was a thoughtfully and purposefully planned event to say, 'What has worked for years isn't working anymore. We had to hear the hard truth and face the fact that our years of pride and swagger didn't mirror the results we were putting in the books,'" Chris said. "And that really started a journey to initiate some major changes, reinvigorate the culture, and make a big company feel small again."

Chili's also unveiled an aggressive new business plan named, "The Plan to Win." The plan involved remodeling all Chili's restaurants, redesigning the kitchens, and reinventing the menus and food. Company leaders set an aggressive goal of doubling their earnings per share in four years.

Fast forward to 2011. The plan was working and things were looking up. The company was seeing positive results. However, attempting to implement so many changes at once was proving to be a huge undertaking, and restaurant leadership was feeling the pressure.

At the annual general manager conference in 2013, leaders began to notice a trend: heavy, emotional conversations were taking place. Restaurant leaders were lamenting ideas like, "I want to be a better mom," "I want to be a better dad," and, "I want to quit smoking." Chris recalls that between breakout sessions, conference attendees were running outside, smoking, and "pounding back the coffee and soda."

"We had a real ah-ha moment where we realized, these people need us to model what a best life can look like. We had a responsibility to model it for them and create the right environment," Chris said.



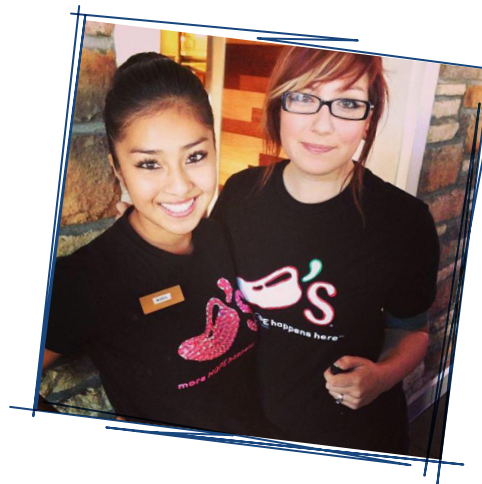
In 2013 the leaders at Chili's began to get plugged into the idea that if they really wanted to change their company, they needed to start with the well-being of their team members. They put a plan in motion called, "The Purpose Experience." This time it was less about business and more about learning and developing, seeking purpose, and going down a well-being journey. In other words – about the whole person.

The annual Chili's leadership conference occurred in late 2014 with a completely different approach. Participants could practice physical well-being with a work out, yoga, a walk, boot camp, or a 5k run with the company CEO.

"We didn't just talk to them about well-being," Chris stated. "We said, 'Let's do this together.' It was about experiences, not about somebody talking at you. So that was a big differentiator."

Chris said another huge differentiator at the 2014 conference was the focus. "In the past, we traditionally had an 80/20 rule; the conference was 80 percent business and 20 percent fun. And we were really good at that model. But [in 2014] we flipped that model on its head. We made it 80 percent about the individual and 20 percent about the business."

The results were powerful. "It was life changing for many people. We have so many stories where people were like, 'That was the moment where I figured it out.' It's been amazing to watch this change and be a part of it," said Chris.



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The change of focus on Chili's culture and team didn't end there; it began to shape the direction and culture within the restaurants. The impact was incredible.

Today, the Brinker International stock price hovers around \$60 a share. But in 2009, it was down to \$4 a share. "At one point it was even lower than that," Chris said. "It was scary. We've completely shifted the way guests perceive us. It just keeps coming back to the idea that your guests are never going to love the company unless your team members do first."

And Best Places to Work survey results show that Chili's employees *do* love their company. Employee engagement has continued to rise, and the company's corporate administration office has been named one of the Best Places to Work in Dallas five times since 2009. In 2015, Chili's was recognized as one of the 100 Best Workplaces for Millennials *and* one of the 100 Best Workplace for Women by Fortune.

It's been more than a year since "The Purpose Experience" was unveiled, but Chili's continues to celebrate the power of purpose. In preparation for the annual leadership conference in late 2015, employees were asked to share more about their journey of purpose. The results were compelling. Employees reported losing more than 4,000 pounds and paying off \$102,000 of debt. More than general managers and 23 area directors were promoted. And more than \$75,000 was donated to charity. The company also shared countless hours of volunteer time clocked and hundreds of stories about connecting deeply with friends, families, and local communities.

"It's amazing to literally see a company culture evolve," Chris said. "It's been an incredible journey to watch and be a part of, and it just keeps getting better."



Ready to turn your organization into a Best Place to Work?

We study the inner-workings of Best Places to Work so we can help organizations create workplaces people love.

In addition to the Best Places to Work contest, Quantum Workplace can help you:

- > Increase employee engagement
- > Attract and retain top talent
- > Decrease turnover
- > Optimize productivity and performance
- > Assess your organization and its leaders
- > Build and promote a great culture and employer brand
- > And more!

