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> [What makes a workplace great?](#)

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What makes a workplace great?

What exactly goes into a great workplace? Senior editor Diane Dierking investigates and finds that companies that foster trust, pride and camaraderie among coworkers rank highest.

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By Diane Dierking, senior editor

Lisa Ratner, project manager for the Great Place to Work Institute, San Francisco, says Robert Levering had been a labor reporter for years when, in the early 1980s, he was convinced by a publisher to apply his unique perspective toward naming the 100 best companies to work for. During a two-year period, Levering and colleague Milton Moskowitz visited 150 companies and interviewed the employees. In 1984, their book, "The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America," was published and became a New York Times best-seller.

A second edition of the book was published in 1993, after which Fortune magazine approached the duo about collaborating to create an annual list. Every year, beginning in 1998, the magazine has published its list of "100 Best Companies to Work For." The list is compiled by the Institute, which was cofounded in 1991 by Levering and Amy Lyman. The Institute now compiles best company lists in 25 countries.

Ratner says Levering and Moskowitz eventually stopped interviewing employees and developed a model upon which to base their rankings. As they developed the model, they were certain the companies that provided the best perks and benefits would prove to be the best companies to work for, Ratner says. This was not the case.

Instead, the model shows that pride in your work, trust and camaraderie among coworkers are the things that make a company great.

The scientist in me felt a need to do some independent experiments, so I polled some engineers myself. I asked which workplace element was most important to them: credibility, respect, fairness (the three components of trust), pride, camaraderie or salary.

"They are all major factors, but the most important to me is pride in my work and my company's work," one respondent says. "Another factor not listed is the creativity/innovation factor; it's nice to work for a company that is performing cutting-edge technology."

Pride and credibility -- meaning the company operates competently and with integrity -- were the most important elements to the engineers I spoke with. I then asked them which was most lacking. The replies varied from pride, credibility and respect.

What about salary? "Salary is important," says one engineer. "But if that's good and everything else is bad, then people are working with the wrong incentives in place, and things are going to go downhill quickly."

It might seem like there are no incentives for a company to endeavor to become one of the "100 Best" -- but that's simply not true. Research conducted by the Institute, as well as other sources, shows that the type of culture that makes a workplace great also leads to higher employee productivity and increased company profits, Ratner says. Many of the companies named on the "100 Best" list also have places on the "Fortune 500" list.

One such company is Eli Lilly and Co., Indianapolis, which holds the No. 73 spot on the 2005 "100 Best" list and is ranked No. 156 on the most recent "Fortune 500" list (based on 2003 revenues).

One Lilly employee says the company truly is a great place to work. "There is a respect for people here that is very unusual," he says, adding that the company provides on-site services, like day care, dry cleaning and video rental. Although the employees pay for these services, it cuts back on the number of after-work errands.

"The Lilly family instilled a culture of --family-- within the organization and a standard of excellence in all that we seek to do," he says. "People are expected to deliver and are held accountable, but we put just as much emphasis on how you get your work done as how much you get done."

But how does a company become great? Eli Lilly built the components into the company from day one -- but changing a company's culture is not an easy thing to do. The Institute offers consulting services to help get companies moving in the right direction, but in the meantime, we can do our part by fostering a bit of trust, pride and camaraderie ourselves.

Did your company make the grade? You can check out the list at the Institute's Web site, www.greatplacetowork.com (<http://www.greatplacetowork.com>).

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