



SI Review: April 2013

Inside the Best Staffing Firms to Work For

April 1, 2013

Workers reveal why their staffing agencies made the list

By Craig Johnson, Katherine Alvarez and Sharon Thomas

What makes great staffing firms tick? What makes some employers so good?

For the last four years, Staffing Industry Analysts has been gauging companies to see how they are doing at keeping their employees happy and productive. Happy employees positively affect the bottom line. We've shown that great workplaces fare well in the marketplace, often outperforming their competitors. "Good workplaces are worth examining if for no other reason than that they enrich the lives of the people working there. ... Since most of us spend the greater part of our waking hours at work, this is no small matter," says Robert Levering, cofounder of the Great Place to Work Institute.

But what truly makes a workplace great? Staffing Industry Analysts' editors spent time talking with the employees at these staffing agencies to find out. We looked into how these employers are pulling out the stops for their employees. But it's not what you think. Sure, trips to the Caribbean or a laundry service are big hits (no surprises there) but the real draw is company culture. It is the environment that allows these workers to feel empowered to get things done. Along the way, they know they have the ears of the C-suite, who make themselves available to help in times of need. In return, the workers get recognized for their achievements. Awards range from trips to ball games to extra hours off to gift certificates to luncheons.

This year's Best Staffing Firms to Work For contest, sponsored by Monster, ranks the top five firms to work for in small, medium and large firm categories based on the number of internal employees. We feature actual personnel in the winning companies, grouped by company size. Here are their stories.

Size category: 20 to 50 employees



All in It Together

Deepika Yammanur always looks forward to coming to work. "There's a huge motivation factor at Akrya. People treat you like family and it's all team-based, a team effort," she says.

Her days start with status updates on the previous day's work with her team. Then it's back to her routine of sourcing, screening, calling and presenting candidates.

Yammanur has worked for Akrya since 2007, except for a three-month gap when she left to work in the IT field. "But I didn't like it," she laments. "I wanted to work here again." Flexibility is one of the things that drew Yammanur back to the company. She was able to telecommute at the end of her pregnancy, enabling her to work up until her due date. Other parents may leave early to pick up their children from school and work from home afterward.

Another draw is that the accessibility of the executive leadership. "They are open-minded. They are friendly. You can just go walk in and talk to them," says Yammanur. "That's what I really love."

The leadership also fosters a teamwork attitude with activities such as monthly breakfasts prepared by a rotation of departments and an appreciation program to publicly recognize helpful coworkers. Akrya also sponsors employees who participate in an annual running/walking event that supports local literacy programs.

The company even weathered the recession as a team, as the CEO assured staff there would be no pay cuts or layoffs. "I have a home and a child to take care of," says

Yammanur. “That kind of assurance was really nice to have.



Leadership Sets Tone

John Nyhart spends his days contacting potential clients and performing the tasks of a sales person as well as managing sales teams, clients and consultants.

“It’s hectic,” he says. “It’s a juggling act for me in this position right now — managing internally, managing up, managing down. It’s a lot of work going on — on a daily basis.”

Nyhart was one of MedSys’ first employees back in the mid-1990s. He worked for the company for about eight years before leaving to spend seven years at a large, publicly traded firm. He returned to MedSys two years ago, and it was management style and company leadership that brought him back.

“The top-level leadership sets the tone for any organization. You really can’t affect a culture from the bottom up. And the people who run this company are just fantastic to work for. They have the right vision, they treat people well, but yet they are extremely successful. They have all the right ingredients for a great place to work,” says Nyhart.

The management style is a mix of involvement, listening, compensating well and rewarding employees for their successes.

While many companies focus on the bottom line and growing bigger, MedSys execs focus on growing the company better and bottom-line growth follows.

“They want the consultants to have a better place to work. They want their employees to have a better place to work. They want to give the customer better service, better commitment to the projects,” says Nyhart.



Proud to Be Accountable

There's no such thing as a typical day at Daley and Associates. Daniel Moore might meet with a potential client, visit a past customer and follow up on a recent placement — all before he gets to the office in the morning.

An industry veteran, Moore has been with 7-year-old Daley and Associates for about five years.

CEO Mike Daley built the company based on collaboration and teamwork, and everyone focuses on customer and candidate service. It's a fun and competitive environment that also pays extremely well, Moore says.

"I've been doing this for 15 years. There's not a more enjoyable staffing firm to work for," he says. "You're proud to be accountable here. You're needed. You're wanted here. You are very visible."

The recession proved Daley's commitment to his staff. As other companies cut personnel, he reassured employees that the company was invested in them and no layoffs would occur.

"Who doesn't want that kind of reassurance?" Moore asks.

The firm experiences very little staff turnover, Moore says, and that loyalty is rewarded greatly with a five-year-anniversary celebration perk. One associate received a family vacation to the Bahamas for his anniversary gift. An avid sports fan got on a first-class trip to New York City to see the Jets play the Patriots, complete with limo service and exceptional seats.

"My five-year anniversary is coming up next month," says Moore. "I don't know what's going to happen, but you ought to call me back!"



Faith-Based Organization

Everyone comes to work each day at iMethods knowing that they work for a higher calling at the faith-based organization.

Alicia Smith says everyone's goal is to create meaningful work — meaningful work for each other, for the candidates they are recruiting and also for their clients.

The smaller size of the firm promotes an entrepreneurial spirit that stems from the company's co-founders and permeates the office.

“Their goal and dream is for everyone to feel like they are part owner, that their contributions to the organization are just as important as anybody's,” explains Smith, who has been with the IT staffing firm for more than four years.

As such, management looks to staff for new ideas, often putting the employee in charge of implementing it.

For example, Smith's passion for health and fitness in her personal life led her to suggest the company have a wellness program. “They loved the idea, so from that point on I've kind of become our wellness director,” Smith says. The program provides discounted gym memberships, on-site healthy snacks, wellness blogs and quarterly lunch-and-learns on subjects such as nutrition, emotional wellness, fitness and financial management.

But it's not all work and no play at iMethods. The break room is equipped with a pool table and basketball hoop, and razor scooters are the mode of transportation throughout the office. The company occasionally brings a masseuse for employees and the group takes incentive trips, which have included adventures such as deep-sea fishing expeditions and trips to basketball games.

“It's fun,” says Smith. “They try to do things that are out of the norm to make sure that the staff has fun.”



Work Hard, Play Hard

On a recent afternoon, Deirdre Kurnett took a break on her patio to enjoy the afternoon with a friend. She knew, however, that she may be taking work calls at 8:30 that evening.

The freedom to schedule workdays for a work/life balance is just one company perk that makes Healthcare IT Leaders a great place to work, says Kurnett.

“What makes the company great, in my opinion, is just you work hard and you play hard,” Kurnett says. “We’ve got all the tools that you need, all the investment that you need and all the training that you need. We’ve got the infrastructure and the right customer relationship management tools that make sense for who we are going after.”

She credits Healthcare IT Leaders’ Managing Principal Bob Bailey with creating a successful company with high-energy and committed staff.

“He empowers people. Of course, he has high expectations and he is going to hire people who thrive on that,” says Kurnett. “He really tries to build all the little things that make you want to get up and go to work, even on days when work is hard.” That includes providing ping-pong tables and the occasional cocktail in the fridge when working late.

Communication is also key at the company. The office has an open-cubicle design and periodically holds lunch-and-learn sessions to garner input from the staff.

“Recruiters are really dedicated here because it is a win-win and people make a ton of money, to be honest with you,” says Kurnett.

And who doesn’t like that?

Size category: 51 to 200 employees



Empowered to Do the Job

When Charity Crawford comes to work at Medical Solutions, she knows she's trusted and empowered to do her job. Her day is balanced between taking care of her travel nurses and communicating with her coworkers. And she knows her coworkers have her back.

"Everyone here is very approachable," says Crawford, who has been with the company for five years. "There's a great support system in place. We're all team players here. We really do genuinely give a darn about each other." Events such as allowing for an afternoon off catching a movie or spending time with each other help foster that team feeling. So does the openness of management.

"I've worked in pretty much all corporate environments prior to Medical Solutions, and I couldn't walk into the manager's office on any given day, whereas I can do that here," she says. "Here, I can walk into the owner's office and he would drop what he's doing to help me out."

And the success is shared, with various cash-based incentive opportunities, and a quarterly bonus structure. "When the company is successful, they pass the benefits off to us," Crawford says.

And being a great place to work makes success easier to achieve, she says. "It makes it really easy for me to talk to the travelers about what we do. It makes them feel good knowing that they are going to be working for a company that treats its employees well. They feel more confident in my abilities to take care of them."



We Never Give Up

Emily Prno says a typical day for the management team at TekPartners/ MedPartners HIM is all about the staff, both in hiring new employees, planning for future growth and providing motivation and support to existing staff — all while adhering to the company’s core values: Be the best, understand the urgency, never give up, have courage to excel and make a contribution. Adherence to those values is even part of the employee review process.

“Our people are our most important asset,” says Prno, who has been with the company for about a year and a half. So in hiring, she’s focused on bringing the right people in at the right time. And for existing employees, the company focuses on how to support them and motivate them to do the best they can.

C-level and senior-level management attend the team huddles, networking events and career fairs to show their support for the rest of the staff. TekPartners/MedPartners HIM management team occasionally creates quarterly contests that focus not just on placements or closing a deal, but on other types of activities to keep the team excited. Prizes for the staff can range from earning cash, permission to leave early or come in late, a lunch or a gift card. The executive team and company as a whole genuinely focus on people as their first priority and it makes a positive difference in the workplace and the established environment.



Driving Each Others’ Success

Every day is different for Allison Penning, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

The days at LaSalle are full of hard work and collaboration. LaSalle is not commission-based; recruiters are salaried and can earn a quarterly bonus based on their individual and their team’s success. As a result, recruiting is relationship-driven, not transactional, Penning explains.

CEO Tom Gimbel is a central figure in their daily lives as well. It’s not unusual for him to take a seat in an open desk and ask an employee not only how work is going, but how his or her personal life is as well. “He genuinely cares about how you’re doing

professionally and personally,” says Penning, who’s been with LaSalle for two years.

“This is a work-hard, play-hard environment,” Penning explains. From re-birthdays, a celebration of an employee’s hire date; to La-Lympics, an annual company-wide Olympics; to March Madness parties; to LaSallemas, an annual surprise party for the company’s inception (last year, Gimbel flew the entire staff to Las Vegas for an all-expense paid weekend), “There’s always something exciting going on,” she says.

Re-birthdays are especially important at LaSalle. “For a year, you’ve worked your butt off and accomplished a lot,” Penning explains. A re-birthday is a celebration of that.

“People get really into it,” decorating the celebrant’s desk and showering him or her with gifts. At the end of the day, the entire company gathers to celebrate, and Gimbel gives a toast for that person. “I actually look forward to my re-birthday more than my actual birthday,” Penning says.



Management Values Us, Our Ideas

After checking her messages and postings at the beginning of each day, Lyn Sedmina heads to the team huddle, where she appreciates learning what everyone else is working on. “My previous employers have had a silo management approach, where it’s almost like you’re competing against each other,” explains Sedmina, who’s been with the company for a year. “Here, we’re all on the same page.”

After the team huddle, her days are exciting and varied. If her day is stressful, she can blow off some steam in the company game room, shooting pool or playing pinball. CEO Sheldon Arora adds to the excitement, throwing out occasional work incentives, such as cash prizes, leaving early or great seats at a sporting event or concert.

What is especially meaningful for Sedmina, though, is the support she gets from the management team. For example, management encourages recruiters to spend more time working with their nurses by appointing one person to handle administrative tasks such as reporting and tracking the nurses’ paperwork. The company also values its employees’ ideas and encourages them to share these concepts openly, rather than adhering to a chain of command approach. “They really listen to us,” she says. Further, management takes a personal interest in everyone’s individual development. “If you

have goals, professional or even personal, they'll actually help you to reach those goals. They really care about everybody," she says.



Feeling Connected to Decision Makers

Veredus employees are told from the start that their days will be very fast-paced. Gina Macaluso, who's been with Veredus for more than six years, says it's an environment they thrive in. "We hit the ground running from the minute we walk in ... which is great," she says.

Her day starts with a morning meeting where they go over placements they've made. "It's exciting to see what positions we've been able to fill. It brings a lot of energy to start your day." That's also when management rolls out contests, which can be corporate-wide or office-specific. The biggest prize is the annual trip for the year's top five performers. This year it's Costa Rica. "I've been to Key West, Lake Tahoe, London, Clearwater Beach," Macaluso says. Smaller contests range from monthly to even daily, such as the number of candidates interviewed in a week. "It's always fun to hear what they are," she says, with prizes ranging from a half day off to \$100 cash.

As busy as the days are, upper management still makes sure employees feel connected. "Veredus is a large company, but we still know the CEO and partners on a personal level," with them making regular visits to the remote offices. "They take a very active role to make sure we are successful and recognize us for our achievements," Macaluso says. "They want us to feel that we can pick up the phone and talk with them about things."

Size category: 201 or more employees



Accountability Drives Staff Performance

Cory Kennedy likes the fact that there is accountability at Collabera. He and his coworkers receive regular input from their managers on performance. “An average day at Collabera involves guidance from management,” says Kennedy. “At the end of the day if your manager’s not holding you accountable, who else will?” he adds. It helps that managers are both supportive and fair in their treatment of staff.

This leadership drives motivated employees to achieve their goals. In addition, the company goes out of its way to provide the right tech tools for the workers to ensure high performance. These tools are cutting edge. And for those who need it or want to excel, there is also access to online training. Employees are also encouraged to keep the lines of communication open. They can call and check in (even daily if required) with their managers. The executive group also maintains the same open door policy.

This open style of discussion and support leads to increased efficiency where Collabera’s internal staff communicate their areas of responsibility and coordinate when required. They work efficiently on different projects, without crossing wires. The streamlining of operations also keeps the clients happy.

But it’s not all work. The company is big on health and team building.

It offers gym and fitness programs. In addition, at least once a week, the co-workers go out as a group and do something fun, such as a bowling event. Workers are encouraged to maintain work-life balance. But work is fun. So employees like Kennedy want to keep at it.

“I enjoy what I do so much for this company I want to do it when I go home,” he says.



Making Life Better

Leila Malekzadeh loves her job. Her day begins by interacting with people she admires and respects.

“I’m excited to come to work because of the people that I work with,” Malekzadeh says. “I think Roth does a really great job recruiting people that are in line with our culture.”

The company’s purpose is “to make life better for the people we serve,” and its promise is “we love to create remarkable experiences: every person, every time.” And this is a feeling that permeates the corporate office, she says.

Roth takes into account individual workers’ strengths and how they fit into the organization. It was at a Roth branch office that Malekzadeh discovered her strength at relationship-building. She is now located at the company’s corporate office in Orange, Calif., managing onboarding and training internal workers. She has been with the company for more than seven years.

Apart from tapping into her strengths, Roth has also provided Malekzadeh interesting projects and opportunities that have helped her grow.

Malekzadeh was part of a team that created an overlay for the company’s database that would allow easier access of information for sales professionals in the field. The overlay allowed sales professionals to get information they needed at a glance without having to go through more time-consuming procedures.



Investing in the Workers

Ashley Curry’s strong bonds with her co-workers motivates her to do more. The company’s emphasis on building a family like environment where the focus is on providing support and resolving challenges creates a productive, unified workforce that Curry is proud to be part of. She has been with the company for the last three years.

She looks forward to coming in to work. “Signature is truly a friends-first environment where everyone respects each other and has fun,” Curry says. “The values we live by, especially ‘doing the right thing,’ are seen on a daily basis in how we treat each other.”

But it’s fun with a purpose. Curry’s current role was created as the result of deep

discussions during a brainstorming session. “Our team realized we had an opportunity to enhance the support consultants receive when they are on assignment and decided it was time to invest and raise the bar of expectations,” Curry says. She was given the autonomy to develop the role. Once the role was created, the management team was supportive, allowing Curry to further develop the role in conjunction with their guidance. Thanks to Signature’s policy of investing in its workers, it now has a new team in the organization that impacts the bottom line. Its employees have that extra level of support that helps them do their job better, ensuring happy clients. “If open discussion was not encouraged and individuals were not empowered to activate change, my role would not exist,” says Curry.



Great Work-Life Balance

A 20-year veteran of CHG, Tammie Healy says the company’s support has allowed her to maintain a great work-life balance.

Her typical day involves feeding her dogs and getting her children off to school before coming in to the office at 10 a.m.

This flexibility enables her to be good at her job while catering to her family. “One of the things that keeps me here is the way that I’m treated, not only as a professional, but respect for my personal life,” Healy says. Empowering workers is what CHG believes in. This has helped Healy’s career. In fact, the company even helped pay for her education to become a nurse. Although she doesn’t practice as a nurse, it’s useful background knowledge for her job. The company also developed her skills as a risk manager. Risk managers assist on any possible claims against providers who contract through CHG.

Healy’s typical activities involve the usual, being at a desk and handling phone calls. However, keeping in mind CHG’s mission to develop its workers, she’s part of a committee that plans activities for different teams. One recent committee meeting included discussion of possible ways to engage in the community, such as volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. “Our goal is to engage our employees both professionally and personally,” she says.



Variety Is the Spice

No two days are the same at Lead IT Corporation. It's this variety that keeps employees like Kishore Earve coming back for more. Despite the lack of routine, which can be challenging, the atmosphere is friendly and the relationships between the workers are collegial. "There are no complexities, no egos," Earve says. "Everybody respects your work."

Earve appreciates the fact that he has the autonomy to screen consultants based on client requirements. Further, he has also has the authority to make decisions on rates. It is this ability to make important judgment calls that helps him grow and be successful at the job. In addition, there is open dialogue with the C-suite. The regular interaction makes him feel a valued member of the team. The executive group believes in empowering the worker. If an idea makes sense for the company, workers can pursue it. This drives employees to innovate.

For instance, the company recently decided to embark on an initiative with the federal government after a worker proposed it. It cost the company money to go out to Washington D.C., but management supported the worker, allowing him to set up meetings with people in D.C. and gain visibility. The result: Lead IT is on the cusp of obtaining contracts with the federal government.

Contracts apart, Lead IT also schedules outings and promotes team-building activities, such as pot lucks, happy hours and bowling events. But at the end of the day, it is the interesting assignments and the freedom that drives the employees to work hard.

"I don't really feel this stuff is getting routine," Earve says. "I'm eager to go to work for the next day."

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Click on list below to enlarge.

THE BEST STAFFING FIRMS TO WORK FOR LIST

Rank	Company Name	Emp. Count	Headquarters	Primary Sector Served	
SMALL (20 TO 50 EMPLOYEES)					
1	Akroya Inc.	25	Sunnyvale, Calif.	IT	
2	MedSys Group Consulting	35	Frisco, Texas	IT	
3	Daley and Associates LLC	23	Boston	Executive Search, Professional	
4	iMethods	20	Jacksonville, Fla.	IT	
5	Healthcare IT Leaders	20	Alpharetta, Ga.	Healthcare IT	
MEDIUM (51 TO 200 EMPLOYEES)					
1	Medical Solutions	113	Omaha, Neb.	Travel nurse, allied healthcare	
2	TekPartners/ MedPartners HIM	100	Coral Springs, Fla.	IT, Healthcare information management	
3	LaSalle Network	64	Chicago	Professional	
4	LiquidAgents Healthcare	57	Plano, Texas	Travel nurse, allied healthcare	
5	Veredus	118	Tampa, Fla.	IT	
LARGE (201 OR MORE EMPLOYEES)					
1	Collabera Inc.	240	Morristown, N.J.	IT	
2	Roth Staffing Companies L.P.	300	Orange, Calif.	Commercial, professional	
3	Signature Consultants	210	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	IT	
4	CHG Healthcare Services	1,510	Salt Lake City	Locum tenens, allied healthcare	
5	Lead IT Corporation	202	Springfield, Ill.	IT	

Click on quotes image below to enlarge.

QUOTES FROM THE TOP

<p>What makes Akrya a great place to work — is the focus on our core values, on the culture we have.</p> <p>— Amar Panchoi, CEO, Akrya Inc.</p>	<p>The people in our company and their commitment to excellence is what makes Veredus a great place to work.</p> <p>— Dan Rodriguez, CEO, Veredus</p>	<p>We create an environment for people to succeed ... An environment where they have opportunity and the right account to work on.</p> <p>— Hemir Shah, co-founder and EVP, Colabera</p>
<p>We care about relationships and creating environments where our employees can grow! Being named a Best Place to Work speaks to the core values of a company, and at iMethods, we strive to live out our Core Values daily.</p> <p>— Chad Perce, CEO, iMethods</p>	<p>So many friendships and business relationships are solidified at Medical Solutions because we all are here to help each other succeed and have fun doing it! This award represents every single person the company.</p> <p>— Craig Meier, president, Medical Solutions</p>	<p>Putting people first is our defining core value... All of the leaders in the company are expected to lead with that core value in mind, and that's how it becomes part of the culture.</p> <p>— Michael Weinholz, CEO, CHS Healthcare Services Inc.</p>
<p>Ours is an environment that rewards enthusiasm, and hard work and teamwork. We're proactive in building a very positive culture and that in turn, has a positive effect on our interactions with our customers.</p> <p>— Bob Bailey, managing principal, Healthcare IT Leaders</p>	<p>We believe that by attracting and retaining the most talented professionals in the business, LiquidAgents Healthcare can continually build a distinguished staffing organization that provides world-class service.</p> <p>— Sheldon Arora, CEO, LiquidAgents Healthcare</p>	<p>Quality, responsibility, adaptability and diversity are values that underpin our success. At Lead IT we foster these values with a core commitment to people.</p> <p>— Ram Talluri, founder and managing director, Lead IT Corporation</p>
<p>Daley and Associates is all about the people. When you bring bright, self-motivated professionals together and give them a platform to succeed, great things happen.</p> <p>— Mike Daley, CEO, Daley and Associates</p>	<p>LaSalle is a great place to work because we put our employees first. We care about their professional and personal success, and value them as a people.</p> <p>— Tom Gimbel, CEO, LaSalle Network</p>	<p>We operate with our original guiding principles of friends first, doing the right thing and our determination to do the best, not the biggest. We live these principles every day while they guide our every action.</p> <p>— Jay Cohen, President & CEO, Signature Consultants</p>
<p>The dedication that we see from every employee and their willingness to go the extra mile for clients and co-workers alike is a testament to the belief in our company values and is what makes our firm a great place to work.</p> <p>— Alan Kravitz, CEO, MedSys Group Consulting</p>	<p>TekPartners/MedPartners HIM truly is people helping people, it is our job, it is our passion. Our employees are quality people and team players all working toward the same goal.</p> <p>— Vito Scatena, CEO and co-founder, TekPartners/MedPartners HIM</p>	<p>It's all about our culture. We challenge our leaders and managers to cultivate an environment where their teams are proud to do good things and the right things for those we serve.</p> <p>— Adam Roth, president and COO, Roth Staffing Companies</p>

[SUBHEAD 1]

Methodology

More than 100 firms took part in the “Best Staffing Firms to Work For” program this year, which was conducted for Staffing Industry Analysts by Quantum Workplace, an Omaha, Neb.-based company.

Internal employees at each firm taking part were asked to complete a 40-question online survey that measures 10 key engagement categories focusing on items including teamwork, trust in senior leaders, feeling valued, manager effectiveness, compensation and benefits.

In order to gather statistically sound results, participating companies must have reached a minimum level of employee participation, based on total number of employees. Responses from each question of each completed survey were compiled and evaluated. Companies were ranked in each size category according to their overall composite score. Winners were chosen based entirely on the survey results.

[SUBHEAD 2]

Traits of Internal Workers

What does it take to become an employee of one of the Best Staffing Companies to Work For? We asked this year's winning companies for the traits they most look for in candidates for internal positions. Here are the most common:

- Cultural fit
- Smart
- Inquisitive
- Adaptable
- Self-motivated, energetic
- Driven to succeed, tenacious
- Good listener
- Honesty, integrity
- Loyal and trustworthy
- Community-minded
- Team player
- Military experience
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Superior communication skills