

CORDELIA TAYLOR'S URBAN OASIS | FALL FINE ARTS

OCTOBER 2001 \$3.00

Milwaukee

MAGAZINE

BEST PLACES TO WORK

20 COMPANIES WITH
GOOD PAY, GREAT
BENEFITS, COOL PERKS.

How does your
job compare?



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Milwaukee Magazine

“Best Places To Work” October 2001

A century ago, “a good job” was one that paid enough to put food on the table and didn’t kill us. Today, we demand more: good pay and benefits, yes, but also reasonable bosses, meaningful work and time enough for the rest of our lives.

Signs seeking help fill the windows of stores and restaurants even in a time of economic softening, and anecdotal reports abound that members of the newest generation of people to fill these jobs are ever more picky. Survey after survey reports that while money may make a difference between the choice between two evenly matched job opportunities, other factors can be just as persuasive – from fringe benefits to the atmosphere of the workplace.

Milwaukee Magazine looked at just what makes a good job and where in the six-county metro area they are to be found.

To that end, we partnered with MRA: The Management Association Inc., a 100-year-old employer association with 2,200 member firms in Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Together, MRA and *Milwaukee Magazine* designed a survey to question companies about their management practices and procedures, including pay and benefits, opportunity for advancement, workplace culture, work-life balance and more. Participation was voluntary, and of the hundreds of employers in the greater Milwaukee area who might have chosen to respond, fewer than 100 actually did so.

We didn’t just stop with self-reporting by employers, however. We asked high-scoring firms to supply random employee lists. We randomly selected 10 people from each for a follow-up telephone survey, wanting to determine whether employees thought their companies lived up to the image presented. We also did our own research, weighing what other knowledgeable sources said about the quality of various workplaces.

In the end, what we found on the part of the best employers was a striking mix of pragmatism and idealism.

Mid-Size Companies 101-499 Employees

3. Building Service Inc.

Interior design and construction
229 employees in metro Milwaukee

A family-focused culture.

If there’s one thing that characterizes the BSI culture, say employees and executives, it’s the notion of the workplace as family - and the importance of family above the workplace.

Company policies reflect a value that emphasizes family life, says President Peter Kordus, a principle integral to the way Chairman and former President Ralph Kuehn ran the business before Kordus. “We always tell employees, when something is happening in your family” - from a loved one’s illness to a child’s school play - “you should take the time to go and experience that. Take the time off and make it up later. The whole person is important, we feel.”

Other family touches abound: A committee mobilizes discreetly to help employees in distress, and BSI provides a dollar-for-dollar match. The fruits of such generosity have ranged from trips to Paris or Disneyland to a day-long cleanup brigade that showed up one Saturday to close the pool and rake leaves at the home of a co-worker stricken with cancer at the same time her husband wrestled with the disease.

To help build teamwork, departments in the company take turns monthly throwing an “appreciation day” for all of the other departments. One such special event was a chili cook-off contest, with voters tossing quarters into a pot to back one or another recipe. The proceeds all went to charity.

The Northwest side company teems with recognition programs, including an open-ended one that simply singles out people who’ve been “caught doing something good.”

At a time when construction labor is hard to find, Kordus says the company’s 19 percent turnover rate last year was below the construction industry’s average. He credits the company’s culture. “We don’t lose people,” he says.

Best Perks: Mid-size employers Building Service Inc.

Along with a wide range of little extras such as dry-cleaning pickup service, employers here get bonuses for referring a business lead, a savings bond when a new baby is born and “honeymoon pay.”