

Strong managers key to a healthy workplace

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<http://www.statesman.com/business/employment/top-workplaces/strong-managers-key-to-a-healthy-workplace-1973714.html>

<http://www.statesman.com/business/employment/top-workplaces/special-awards-employers-with-the-highest-ratings-in-1973683.html>

Best managers

JB Goodwin Realtors

Ranking: No. 6 midsize employer

What it does: Real estate

What employees say: "Answers my questions when approached. Informs me of opportunities that will help me further my career. Encourages me both when I do good and when I'm frustrated."

It all starts at the top.

Managers make or break workplaces, says Alex Charfen, CEO of the Austin-based Charfen Institute. Talented leaders motivate, are approachable, offer opportunities for advancement and provide routine feedback. Not-so-skilled bosses often micromanage, rule by fear and spend most of the day locked in their offices, unavailable.

"Morale craters because people don't know what's going on, how to make things better, or what their role is," said Charfen, whose company provides business leadership coaching around the globe. "Human beings, by their nature, want to perform. They want to succeed. They want to be recognized."

Executives at many of the businesses highlighted in the American-Statesman's 2011 Top Workplaces of Greater Austin special section drew praise from employees for taking proactive steps on a daily basis to keep toxicity out of the workplace.

Communication is one area where Cirrus Logic CEO Jason Rhode excels, his workers say.

"Communicates company direction, decisions and status clearly, openly and honestly," one employee said in an anonymous survey response.

Another described Rhode as "charismatic and approachable."

And he apparently throws great parties, too, or so we're told.

At First National Bank of Bastrop, another Top Workplaces honoree, workers report bosses are family-focused.

"Everyone is very caring," one staffer said in an anonymous survey response. "First National is like a family."

"The senior management cares about all employees and their families," a second employee wrote.

Workers at JB Goodwin Realtors say they get regular feedback and bosses are always willing to lend a helping hand.

Survey responses from employees indicate the company's leaders are "always up, never down," "extremely encouraging and kind" and "always finding something to compliment."

There's still hope for businesses that didn't make the cut this year, Charfen says.

He urges bosses to give employees a "daily win" \u2013 some sort of measurable goal that can be easily monitored, allowing for instant feedback.

"We all want and crave feedback," Charfen told the American-Statesman. "Show them how they stand. Show them how they're winning."

Charfen's office also has a "no-gossip" policy, and he urges other executives to take a strong stance on gossip in the workplace.

"It's damaging," he said. "It hurts people. It hurts companies."

Encourage employees to bring complaints to someone in a position to take action, Charfen says.

"You save time," he said. "You save effort. You save energy."

Gossip can breed fear in the workplace, but it's certainly not the only thing that has people looking over their shoulders, author Tom Rieger said in a recent interview. Bureaucracy found in many offices can lead to fear-based behavior, Rieger writes in his new book, "Breaking the Fear Barrier."

"That fear causes people to believe that they need to create walls and barriers to protect themselves, even though those walls and barriers make it harder for others in the company to succeed," he said.

The solution?

"Leaders need to create an environment where courageous behavior can thrive, where what's best for the individual is in perfect alignment with what's best for the overall organization," Rieger said.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin