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4 newcomers to the ranks share what keeps employees motivated, happy

Roger Showley | November 12, 2017

One worker calls the workplace “nirvana.” Another prizes the freedom to pursue an idea.” “I feel like I have a career, not a job,” said a third.

Conduct an anonymous poll of employees and you can get back gripes about bosses and low pay.

But in company after company on the Union-Tribune’s annual top workplace survey, unprompted kudos pour out from the minions in the trenches.

It’s not always about the free beer, ping pong table breaks and dog-friendly policies.

The secret ingredient can be as easy as flextime to handle family matters, an open-door policy to the CEO and a participatory environment where employees have a say.

Four of the top companies new to the survey share some of their recipes for success. (Employment figures are for San Diego locations.)



Ruben Durazo (left) and Michael Carrell sell holiday wreaths at Greenwood's annual Wreaths Across America drive to place wreaths at veterans' gravesites. (NorthStar Memorial Group)

- Established 1907, acquired by NorthStar Memorial Group in 2014
- Operates 135-acre cemetery with more than 75,000 graves, crypts and scatterings
- 118 employees
- Location: Southeastern San Diego

In the “death-care” business, as the mortuary industry calls it, [Greenwood](#) inspires its employees with frequent recognition for customer service via monthly award dinners, offsite activities and support for employees’ causes.

“We’re definitely a work hard, play hard company,” said General Manager Cathy Fiorelli, who has been on staff for 17 years.

She said employee turnover is low and new hires are often found through referrals and chance meetings.

Those positive feelings show up in the survey comments:

“Funeral service has been my lifelong calling and pursuit,” said one. “Since my teens when I first began in the profession part-time, through my obtaining my degree in mortuary science in my 20s and here, decades later, I am still passionate and enthused about this very special thing we do — so fulfilling.”

Employees often work on holiday weekends when visitorship spikes, Fiorelli said. On [Wreaths Across America](#) day, this year on Dec. 16, the staff sells three wreaths for \$30 to place at the graves of veterans. Fiorelli said it’s the only local nonmilitary cemetery to participate.

The staff offices have not been updated to take on a free-wheeling, millennial-like atmosphere.

“We’re unfortunately still in the cubicle mode,” Fiorelli said. But she said it is time to change some of the artwork on the walls.