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MEET the Ten Best Staffing Firms to Work For, *SI Review* December 2009

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By Julie McCoy

1. Hire Dynamics

Headquarters: Duluth GA

Specialty: skilled staffing (call center, clerical/high-end administrative and light industrial)

CEO: Dan Campbell

Website: www.hiredynamics.com

Phone: 678-482-8041

Number of full-time employees: 72

Sometimes companies hire people only to find out later that they weren't a good fit. Recognizing that any "mis-hire" is a waste of company time and money, Hire Dynamics always strives to hire the right people from the very beginning, says CEO Dan Campbell.

Hire Dynamics strongly believes in the concept of topgrading, an interview process that helps employers find the high achievers or "A Players" and weed them out from the rest of the pack, Campbell points out. "It really starts from the front end and having a recruiting system that can attract top talent," he says.

Because Hire Dynamics hires highly motivated people who are self-starters, there's no need to micromanage. The company simply tells people what needs to be done and then lets them figure out how to do it on their own, Campbell says.

Hire Dynamics recognizes that people have a life outside of work and is good when it comes to providing employees with work/life balance, Campbell notes. "You never want to miss out on the important things in life," he says. "Personal life takes priority over work. Our people work hard, but it's on their terms, not our terms. People want to have the flexibility to come and go as they please and not be dictated to."

Sonya Buckley, talent retention manager for Hire Dynamics, says: "We want to make sure our employees have balanced living. We're not clock punchers at all. If someone has something to do with their family and it's important to them, they leave."

One person who can attest to that is Scott Selby, a direct hire recruiter who works in Hire Dynamics' RX division. Selby finds the company to be flexible when any issues arise related to his two children, one of whom is under a year old. "When I need to stay home and take care of somebody, they're fine with that," he says. "It's family first."

At Hire Dynamics, when an employee does a good job it doesn't go unrecognized. The company gives quarterly and annual awards for outstanding performance, Buckley says.

Hire Dynamics also is good about communicating with employees. Staff members are always kept informed about what's going on. News is always shared rather than hidden. "We're a full-disclosure organization that fosters a lot of trust," Buckley says. "There's a tremendous amount of trust at all levels."

Atlanta regional manager Jeannette Blake points out that Hire Dynamics gives people the opportunity to grow and advance in their career. The company makes every effort to promote from within, she says, noting that some people who have been with the company for five years have held three to five positions during that time. "We try to find what people are best at and highlight that, and also let them expand their interest," Blake says. "They see that mobility from within."

Hire Dynamics also does a good job of providing training to employees, Blake says. Employees receive at least 40 hours of training a year that is tailored to their specific division and the position they seek.

Hire Dynamics provides tuition reimbursement for employees who want to go back to school and learn new skills or brush up on old ones. Also, if an employee is interested in becoming a certified staffing professional, Hire Dynamics will pay for the cost of the test and books. The company even organizes study groups for people who are interested in becoming certified staffing professionals, Blake says.

When employees have an anniversary with Hire Dynamics, they receive a personal handwritten note from Campbell and also get to take the day off with pay.

Some companies make little or no effort to obtain feedback from employees, but that's not the case at Hire Dynamics. At the end of every year, the company gives a survey to internal staff and then makes changes the following year based on the results, Buckley says. "It's a really good form. It's anonymous. They can give a lot of feedback. It's one of the top things we do that helps us ensure we're a best place to work."

Malinda Melchior, on-site staffing specialist at Hire Dynamics, has been with the company for three years and doesn't plan on leaving anytime soon, she says.

While some people loathe going to work in the morning, Melchior actually looks forward to it. "It's not a chore to go to work," she says. "It's the excitement of: What are we going to do today?"

Melchior says her boss, Emily Ellison, is wonderful. "She's creative. She's fun. She brings in cookies. She wears a smile on her face. Nothing is not workable. It's refreshing. It kind of goes from the top down. It kind of flows all the way through the company, the communication and the feeling valued."

2. LiquidAgents Healthcare

Headquarters: Plano TX

Specialty: healthcare staffing

CEO: Sheldon Arora

Website: www.liquidagents.com

Phone: 972-244-6700

Number of full-time employees: 168

Is it work or is it Wheel of Fortune? Move over, Pat Sajak and Vanna White, you've got some competition. At LiquidAgents, when the staff members notice one of their colleagues doing something great or having a difficult week, they can nominate that person to spin the company's prize wheel, according to CEO Sheldon Arora.

Some of the prizes given away multiple times each week include a free lunch, a "skip" pass that entitles the winner to leave work early, a car wash, a free tank of gas and cash. "It's done in a very casual, very fun kind of way," Arora says.

LiquidAgents does "Free Lunch Fridays" a couple of times a month, which employees love because it saves them money. They don't have to go out to eat or make their lunch at home that morning.

LiquidAgents also has a Chi lounge equipped with a couch and flat-screen TV. Employees can go in there to make a personal call or even take a quick nap, Arora points out. And for parents who may need to bring their children to work for whatever reason, LiquidAgents has a kid room equipped with toys, books and playpen. "Whatever you would expect kids would need, we have it in there," Arora says.

People who do an exceptional job at LiquidAgents make the company's High Roller award and become the "High Roller of the Month," a privilege that entitles them to stay in a suite that is stocked with snacks of their choice. "It's nice to have the honor and recognition," says Chuck Blattner, who oversees the company's federal staffing division.

At LiquidAgents, it's all about having fun not only at work but outside work, too. For example, once a month the staff get together and go out for "Happy Hour" at a local restaurant.

During football season the company holds tailgating parties where people wear the shirts and hats of their favorite team and also bring in some food for an office potluck. And at Halloween time, the company does a contest with prizes.

"It's just a really fun environment," says territory representative Oren Lavi. "We're always doing things together as a group. We try to keep things lively and fun. There's always something going on. We feel like we're friends with each other, which is really cool."

Lavi, who has been with LiquidAgents for nearly three years, notes that the company is good when it comes to providing work/life balance. When both his kids caught the flu and he had to take them to the doctor, that was fine, he points out. "There's no question," he says. "It's just OK. No matter what, you have to have happiness at home. They don't want anything to stand in the way of that."

Lavi likes the fact that he is given the responsibility and trusted to do his job. "You have ownership in the business," he says. "You feel like it's yours, which is really cool."

Cindy Yates, a senior recruiter for LiquidAgents, likes that Arora has an open door policy and that he's accessible. She worked at some companies where she actually never personally met the CEO, she points out. Yates appreciates the opportunity to learn from Arora. "He has a lot of advice he can offer," she says.

Yates feels like LiquidAgents pays her what she's worth and she likes that every year she gets regular raises. She also likes the fact that the company pays 90% of employees' healthcare benefits and matches their 401(k) contributions.

Blattner says everyone's opinion is valued at LiquidAgents, whether it's someone's first day at the company or the employee has been there several years. If people want to switch teams or focus or take their job in a different direction, that can easily be arranged, Blattner points out. "If they feel like they want to wash dishes instead of sweep the floor, let them wash dishes then," he says.

Yolanda Trevino, a search consultant with LiquidAgents who has been with the company a year, says she appreciates that she receives regular feedback from her manager, so she can improve. She feels comfortable approaching her manager if she has thoughts and suggestions. "It's an open-door policy. You can go to them [management] at any time."

Suzanne Lane, a sales representative for LiquidAgents who just started with the company this past summer, says she's very impressed with the training provided. Everyone who is new at the company receives 90 days of training. "It's the strongest training I've been to," she says. "They would certainly rather over-train than under-train. I'm shocked at how much I know." Lane also likes that Arora sits down with new employees at least once every two weeks.

3. Jackson & Coker

Headquarters: Alpharetta GA

Specialty: healthcare staffing

President: Sandy Garrett

Website: www.jacksoncoker.com

Phone: 800-272-2707
Number of full-time employees: 66

Jackson & Coker, a division of Jackson Healthcare, knows that in order to be successful, it needs to have the right people on board. That's why the company is very thorough in the hiring process, says president Sandy Garrett.

Every candidate interviews with multiple people at the company. Jackson & Coker also uses a 20-question personality test to see if someone is going to be a good fit. Candidates take the survey online and then Jackson & Coker gets back a profile that says this person will work better alone, or this person will work best as a team, for example. "Ninety percent of people I have interviewed say it's pretty accurate," says Garrett. "If you don't bring in the right people, it's all downhill."

Garrett says her company hires positive people with positive attitudes. "We don't hire Eeyores, we hire Tiggers," she explains.

Jackson & Coker doesn't have a lot of turnover. Most people in management positions have been with the company for 15 years. Plus, the average recruiter has been with the company for seven years, which is nice because clients call and they get the same person rather than having to start off with someone new.

The company wants its employees to be healthy and has a cafeteria at its headquarters that features healthy, affordable food as well as a gym. Employees undergo time management and diversity training through Jackson University, which is offered through parent company Jackson Healthcare. Employees also have the option of participating in a "Lunch and Learn" session through Jackson University that covers a number of topics; for example, how to deal with your boss or having difficult conversations.

This year Jackson & Coker also brought in a phone trainer to train and critique staff on their phone skills. The trainer was with the company for six months. "It gave people something to try," says Garrett. "It gave us an edge above people who weren't trained."

Jackson & Coker also has a Wall of Fame that recognizes staff who have broken a record. Anyone who makes the Wall of Fame receives a certificate and \$250. The company also has a breakfast club once a month where anyone who meets or exceeds their personal goals is taken out for breakfast.

Jeff Weir, senior VP of sales for Jackson & Coker's radiology division, who has been at the company since 1991, says he feels valued and appreciated. "You feel like you're rewarded for what you've done," he says.

The environment keeps people in a positive mood and keeps him moving forward and in a positive direction, he says. "It's just a good work environment."

Weir makes an effort to not micromanage the people he supervises. "I love working with them. They love working with me. It's a good working environment. The kind of place you want to come to every day."

Dominic Candelario, credit collection manager for Jackson & Coker, says he likes that the company gives raises and bonuses on a regular basis. He has almost doubled his salary in the nine years he has been at the company. Another thing he likes is that Jackson & Coker pays 75% to 85% of his benefits package and matches his 401(k).

4. locumtenens.com

Headquarters: Alpharetta GA
Specialties: healthcare staffing
CEO: Shane Jackson
Website: www.locumtenens.com
Phone: 800-930-0748
Number of full-time employees: 130

At locumtenens.com, a division of Jackson Healthcare, it's all about respecting people and believing in

them, says CEO Shane Jackson. "Everything we do starts with fundamental respect for individuals, truly valuing individuals for what they are and who they are," he says.

Locumtenens.com's goal is to help people be successful not only as employees but also as individuals, Jackson points out. "Our goal is to give each and every person the tools they need to be successful," he says. "It drives the way we communicate. It drives the way we manage. It drives the type of environment we have."

Jackson says locumtenens.com provides a "fail safe" environment. Employees are encouraged to take risks and try new things, and if it doesn't work out, that's OK. They can view it as a learning experience, and they don't have to worry about losing their job. "We don't punish failure," says Jackson. "We reward innovation."

One of the many happy campers at locumtenens.com is senior marketing business intelligence specialist Christina Cruz, who has been with the company nearly three years. Cruz says she likes the projects she works on, the independence she is given and working with her team.

She also likes that she has been able to change and grow in her role. "Just knowing that I have the ability to do that here and the support to do that here is great," she says. "It comes down to the company supporting me."

While a lot of people dread Monday mornings, that's not the case for Cruz. She's excited to get back to work after the weekend. "On Sunday night, I'm not going: Oh man, tomorrow's Monday," she says.

Cruz appreciates that management is accessible and makes a point to interact with staff. She interacts with the partners of the company on a weekly, if not daily, basis. "I feel valued here," she says. "I feel support by my direct manager."

Locumtenens.com is a positive, upbeat place where employees can trust each other and the leadership, Cruz says. "You just really feel like the leadership here wants to go in the right direction."

There's also a lot of camaraderie at locumtenens.com. Employees often think of the people they work with not only as colleagues but also as friends, and they get together outside of work. John O'Neil, travel expense coordinator who works in the accounting department, says he goes to Braves games and hockey games with people from work. He also went over to one colleague's house to help put in a new kitchen sink.

Bethany Hanak, director of recruiting for locumtenens.com's surgery team, says what has kept her at the company are the people, the corporate culture, and the opportunity for growth and advancement. Hanak started off as a research consultant and worked her way up.

Keith Newport, director of research consulting for locumtenens.com, says the opportunity for advancement also has kept him around. Newport started in a sales position and worked his way up. "The opportunity for advancement is huge," he says.

Locumtenens.com employees receive education and training through Jackson University, which is offered through parent company Jackson Healthcare.

Another thing that makes locum-tenens.com a good place to work is that it pays 100% of its employees' benefits and matches their 401(k) contributions.

Locumtenens.com has a restaurant called Ciao that serves breakfast and lunch (there are plenty of healthy options from which to choose) and employees get a 25% discount.

Other amenities include a health club that has a racquetball court, spa, showers and steam room. Those who choose the highest deductible on their healthcare plan get to use the club for free. Personal trainers, physical therapists, massage therapists and stretch therapists all work at the club.

There's also a video game room with a pool table and ping pong table. And what would work be without

the chance to golf? There's even a putting course on the back part of the building.

Locumtenens.com gives a service excellence award and producer-of-the-month award to employees who have had outstanding performance. Staff nominate their colleagues for both awards, and the winners of both receive a trophy and a \$250 gift card. Plus, those who earn the service excellence award are eligible to participate in the company's prestigious President's Club.

Jackson himself sends out an email announcing the winners and a write-up with what the person who nominated them says. "It's pretty special when you see that come through," says Cruz, who was nominated for the service excellence award by her manager and won.

Locumtenens.com also has a mentoring program. People who have been with the company for a while can take new people under their wing.

Additionally, locumtenens.com allows telecommuting for people who want to work from home.

Locumtenens.com and its parent company, Jackson Healthcare, believe in community service. This November two people from locumtenens.com went to Honduras to do free surgery on local residents through the company's Medical Missions program.

Each December Jackson Healthcare generates money for gifts for foster kids by doing Jeans Month. Employees pay \$20 to wear jeans all month and the money is used to purchase holiday gifts for foster children. "A lot of them are in their teens and boys," says Cruz. "We buy them what they'd like on their wish list. We wrap the gifts even for the kids. It's pretty awesome." Also, Jackson Healthcare is a sponsor of a 5K race that raises money for the Alpharetta Police Athletic League.

5. Arcus

Headquarters: Hummelstown PA

Specialties: technology staffing

CEO: Doug Firestone

Website: www.arcus.net

Phone: 877-570-8040

Number of full-time employees: 90 (50 in the United States, 40 in Costa Rica)

When Doug Firestone launched Arcus in October 1999, he knew the most important thing he needed to have was a strong culture and people who bought into that culture.

Culture really is the heart of Arcus and its DNA, Firestone explains. Arcus makes a point to hire people who embrace the company's culture and want to see the company succeed.

Employees themselves actually developed an "Arcus Culture Statement" that highlights the five key elements that today define the company's culture: integrity, commitment to winning, passion, teamwork and openness.

"[Motivational speaker] Jack Daly says we are the definition of culture," says Firestone. "You just walk in the company and you see the energy, you feel the energy."

At Arcus, culture and fun go together. Every six to eight weeks the company holds "Arcus Fun Days" and everyone gets to take some time off and do something fun. Past activities have included white water rafting, a trip to Dave & Busters, hiking the Appalachian Trail, barbecues and visiting a local farm.

Everyone at Arcus gets a BlackBerry that can be used for both business and personal needs. "My husband can call me. My kids. It doesn't matter," says database manager Karen Dobosh. Arcus pays not only for the BlackBerry itself but the monthly service fee.

In addition, the company pays a portion of employees' home Internet service each month. All they have to do is submit their bill, and Arcus reimburses them for part of it.

Arcus pays 100% of employee benefits and does a 50% match on employees' 401(k)s. The company

also pays 70% of benefits for spouses and families as well, and provides domestic partner benefits to gay and lesbian employees.

Arcus truly believes in diversity and strives to hire people who represent diversity not only in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation but also in terms of ideas and opinions, points out Ben Allatt, director of diversity and outreach. "Diversity is important, even if it's something that's not largely recognized in our geography," he says.

Arcus has a fitness center at its headquarters that features treadmills, bikes, ellipticals, free weights, a basketball court, a volleyball court and badminton. The gym is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and Firestone estimates that 80% of people at corporate take advantage of it. In the spring, Arcus also does a weight loss contest modeled after the TV show "The Biggest Loser" that helps employees shed those extra pounds.

Arcus hires college graduates and then places them in an apprenticeship program that provides them with training and personal development. When they finish the intense, 16-week program, they are placed in recruitment or sales positions and are very productive, says Firestone.

Arcus also is very civic-minded and participates in food and blood drives as well as block parties to raise money for various initiatives.

In addition to being named one of the Top 10 Best Staffing Firms to Work For by Staffing Industry Analysts, Arcus was named one of the Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania in 2008 and 2007.

Merritt Neale, VP and chief technology officer, says, "The people here are definitely great to work with. It's a young company in terms of thinking and energy level. Everyone is a hard worker. Work hard, play hard definitely applies here. People are genuinely nice. Everyone is afforded an opportunity to weigh in on a decision or an idea. Don't leave any stone unturned. Bring those ideas to the table."

Missy Flexman, a recruiter and account executive who has been with Arcus nearly eight years, says that if she's looking for a challenge or a change, she feels comfortable letting the company know. And she's particularly impressed with Firestone. "It's definitely for Doug about the people," she says. "It's about how to help people."

Allatt also praises Firestone. "Doug has always been a very present part of our organization. Doug doesn't ask anything of employees that he wouldn't do himself. He involves himself with employees at all different levels. In no way is he ever a distant CEO. Most people who work here have developed a personal relationship with him. I've worked for organizations where that is certainly not the case."

6. Akraya

Headquarters: Sunnyvale CA

Specialties: information technology staffing and solutions

CEO: Amar Panchal

Website: www.akraya.com

Phone: 408-907-6400

Number of full-time employees: 33

Once people join Akraya, they stay. The Sunnyvale CA-based information technology staffing firm's turnover rate among internal staff is "less than 2 or 3%," according to CEO Amar Panchal.

No one has ever left Akraya to join a competitor. The only thing that has ever caused anyone to leave the company is a career or life change, Panchal says. Akraya has actually had people leave and then come back because they miss working for the company so much. "We do have a good environment for people to work in," Panchal points out.

At Akraya, it's all about finding the right people from the very beginning, rather than making the mistake of hiring someone who isn't a right fit and then having to let that person go.

Anyone who is being interviewed meets not only with Panchal but also with several other people within the company. If the individual happens to be interviewing for a sales position, he or she will meet with

members of the sales team and the recruiting team as well. Afterward Panchal will seek feedback from the sales and recruiting team before making a final decision.

Those lucky enough to land a position at Akraya know it's a great company for which to work. What makes it a shining star?

For one thing, Akraya recognizes and rewards staff for their hard work and achievements. Tanya Taneja, director of operations, says, "I put in my work, I get rewarded for my work, and I still have time for personal time." Adds Deepika Yammanur, a senior technical recruiter: "For every small thing you do, you get a special recognition. They always appreciate what you have done and recognize your efforts."

There's also very little micromanagement. Human resources coordinator Krista Davalos says she likes that her manager, Taneja, doesn't watch over her like a hawk. "She trusts me enough to make sure I get things done. I just have a really good relationship with her where I feel good in my role."

Everyone at the company is kept well informed via daily and monthly meetings and the company Intranet. "There is not much speculation as to what is really going on," says Taneja.

Additionally, Akraya provides employees and their spouses with free membership to a gym that is just a few minutes' walk away.

Akraya also partners with a local professional housecleaning service, and employees can get their homes cleaned up to two times a month with the company footing nearly the entire bill. All employees have to pay is \$10 each time.

Davalos says she feels valued and appreciated. "Feeling valued in this company is not an issue. Everyone feels valued in some way or another. That's what keeps the company such a happy place to work."

Marketing and communications manager Eszter Szikora says she likes that the company encourages creativity and that management is always willing to listen to her ideas and suggestions. "Hands down, it's the best place I've ever worked," she says. "I can't even compare it to any previous place I've worked."

Milissa Ales-Barnicoat, VP of sales at Akraya, says one thing she likes about the company is that, "You have the opportunity to kind of run your own path," and there aren't a lot of policies and procedures to clear when you're trying to get something done.

Ales-Barnicoat says she trusts that the company is going to do the right thing. At Akraya, it's all about doing the right thing for employees, clients and consultants, she says. "In all of our decisions, it has to be a win, win, win."

Says Ales-Barnicoat: "No one is here to create a small company. We're here to attract the best people and build a powerhouse. We've got a foundation to do that. You have got to have a company where talent wants to work."

7. Sapphire Technologies

Headquarters: Woburn MA

Specialty: information technology staffing

President: Bob Dickey

Website: www.sapphire.com

Phone: 1-877-277-4473

Number of full-time employees: 375

Sapphire Technologies, a division of Randstad, is a place where people can grow and advance their career. People often start at the bottom and work their way up, says Bob Dickey, president. Promoting from within is a huge part of Sapphire's culture and what has made the company so successful, Dickey explains.

The majority of Sapphire's executives started in a lower position at the company. Dickey himself is a perfect example: He joined the company in 1994 as an account manager and then worked his way up.

Another person who has worked his way up is Sapphire's senior VP John Stuart, who started off as a technical recruiter in 1993. The company has helped him become an "intrapreneur" and kept him on the edge of his seat for the last 16 years, he says. He envisions himself staying at Sapphire through retirement.

While many people enjoy working at Sapphire because the company allows and even encourages them to climb the ladder, if climbing the ladder isn't something an employee wants, that person is never forced to do so and isn't punished for staying where he or she is, Dickey stresses.

Any time Sapphire has a job opening, it tries to find a current employee to fill the position. In fact, Sapphire doesn't look outside the company to fill an open-ing unless and until it has exhausted every possibility in-house, according to Dickey. The benefit of keeping it internal is that you have someone who already knows the company and has less of a learning curve, he explains.

Sapphire makes a point to recognize and reward employees for their hard work. For example, the company's top performers are eligible for membership in the prestigious President's Club, a privilege that entitles them and their spouses to an all-expense paid, four-day three-night trip to somewhere warm. Past trips have gone to Cancun, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Cozumel and the Bahamas.

Most people who earn a spot in the President's Club are salespeople and recruiters, but there are a few opportunities for administrative people to go as well.

Branch manager Joanne Snow has made the President's Club 11 or 12 times. "I've kind of lost count, honestly," she says. "It's great. It's something you look forward to each year. It's a nice kudos. It's a nice recognition. It's a long-standing honor that is part of our culture here that people really enjoy. It's an excellent motivator."

Sapphire also provides a lot of training to its staff. There is a training session in Boston every year for recruiters and salespeople. Other perks include gym and computer discounts.

At Sapphire, staff are encouraged to get involved in any kind of community outreach. They can take one day off a year to volunteer and not only are they still paid but also they don't have to take it as personal, vacation or sick day.

Sapphire employees can share their thoughts or suggestions on Sapphire Speaks, a link on the company Intranet. "One of the things we're constantly promoting is ideas," says Dickey. "We want to know from employees what they are seeing, what they are hearing. Our number one asset is not the service we provide but our employees." The company also has a direct line to its HR department and an anonymous email set up where staff can report a problem, complaint or ethical issue.

When a Sapphire employee has an anniversary with the company, he or she receives a card personally signed by Dickey. Sapphire also gives staff special gifts on their five-, 10- and 15-year anniversaries. For example, Snow – who has been with the company for 27 years – still remembers how 17 years ago, for her 10th anniversary, she and her husband received an all-expense paid long weekend at a hotel in Nantucket. "They do an excellent job at milestone anniversaries," she says.

Snow says what's kept her at Sapphire is the people. She's particularly impressed with the management. "Upper-level management is dedicated to making sure internal staff have the tools to succeed in a market that is ever-changing," she says. "That's something they're good at, making sure we've got what we need to be effective, stay ahead of the curve and stay ahead of the competition. ... Sapphire has done just a terrific job of staying ahead."

Carrie Welch, an administrative assistant who has been with the company for five years, says it's the best place she's ever worked. "They really put you in charge of your own success. They allow you the freedom to make decisions for your role. John Stuart is awesome at empowering people to take charge of their jobs and make a difference every day."

Welch, 28, says Sapphire is great at hiring young people and that the company makes a point to hire high-caliber people. "The interview process is very thorough. You have to have a pretty strong character to work here. ... Everybody is hard working. Everybody is competitive. They come to work and they want to be successful. They want to be the best team. Work hard now, and when you go home, you're going to be on top of the world."

Concludes Welch: "I don't think I could find a better opportunity for myself. I'm learning more every day. They really do allow you to grow. That's what I'm looking for – how to better myself and my skills. I definitely don't plan on leaving."

Account manager Ashley Staggs has only been working at Sapphire since February, but already she knows it's the place she wants to be. "I am thrilled working here. I love the culture. I love the management. They are very motivating, very inspiring." Staggs likes how management makes a point to interact with staff. It's not like they're ghosts that she never sees or hears from. "We see our upper-level management a few times a year," she says. "The president of our company, our senior VP and regional manager, they all make a point to have face-to-face-time with their employees. That kind of interaction keeps up the morale and the culture."

8. Nelson Family of Companies

Headquarters: Sonoma CA

Specialties: a wide range of commercial staffing, accounting and finance, technology and legal staffing

CEO: Gary Nelson

Website: www.nelsonhr.com

Phone: 866-466-3576

Number of full-time employees: 275

It's all about family at the Nelson Family of Companies, says Gary Nelson, who runs the company with his wife Marcia and their sons Craig and Chase. Not only is Nelson a family-run business, but also employees are treated like family and feel like they're working with family.

"I like working for a family company," says Megan Lendo, who handles credit collections for Nelson and has been with the company for two years. "I really like the family atmosphere."

Nelson strongly believes in giving back to the community in which it operates and encourages its employees to get involved in community service, Lendo points out. She's mentoring a 10-year-old girl in fourth grade through a program called Stand By Me, which is offered through the Sonoma Valley Mentoring Alliance.

Spanish is the little girl's first language, and Lendo is helping her improve her English. "I love it," she says. "We play games. I also help her with homework. She goes to a bilingual school, so we practice reading books in English and Spanish."

Tim Schaefer, a field technician at Nelson, tutors at the Boys and Girls Club of Sonoma County and has also helped the organization with its IT infrastructure. "It's been one of the greatest things I've ever done," he says. "Gary really makes it easy to go out and volunteer."

In addition to encouraging community service, Nelson is good about recognizing and awarding its top salespeople and recruiters. The company even has a "Rookie of the Year" award for newcomers who have done an exceptionally good job. "People really appreciate feeling valued," says Nelson. "We try to do that on a regular basis."

Each quarter, Nelson also gives a Care Award to someone who has gone out of his or her way to help a colleague. The award is open to anyone in accounting, human resources, information technology, business process, operations and marketing.

Those who win a Care Award are eligible to be in the company's prestigious President's Club.

Since Nelson values employee longevity so much it established a group called Tenured Nelson Talent (TNT) for people who have been with the company eight years or more. Those in the group are treated to an appreciation lunch once a year.

"Gary always gets up and makes a speech and thanks us," says TNT member Bev Abernathy. "It's one of his favorite times. It demonstrates the loyalty he has from many people."

Abernathy joined Nelson in 1972 and has been with the company for 33 of the past 37 years. She left to pursue an interest in medicine back in 1976, but found she missed the staffing industry, and Nelson in particular, so much that she decided to come back four years later, in 1980. And she's stayed ever since.

What's kept her with the company all these years? She likes the fact that Nelson gives its employees the opportunity to explore different things and climb the ladder, she says. Abernathy, who currently serves as vice president of credit and collections management, started off as a branch manager and worked her way up.

Schaefer also says he appreciates the opportunity to grow and advance in his career. His next goal is to be a facilities manager or director, he says.

Stacey Eulberg, senior general ledger accountant for Nelson, says the people she works with keep her there. "We have some really great people who work here. They give it their all. We just have a variety of people. They'll help you. I work with a bunch of really talented people. Everybody here is very intelligent, and they're good at their job."

Says Dawn Garzoli, director of sales for Nelson: "I admire my team members and the passion and skill level that they bring to the table. I appreciate the vision of our leadership and their challenge to continuously raise the bar. At Nelson, I am confident in the quality of our talent, our service deliverables and bottom line, our commitment to our clients."

Garzoli adds that, "The motto at Nelson is that every person we come in contact with (whether it is a candidate, co-worker, vendor, client or prospect) will leave our meeting or our branch feeling better than they did prior to the conversation. We are large enough to support any opportunity, yet we are privately held and small enough to turn on a dime and provide flexible, innovative and customized solutions – and our chairman is only a phone call away."

9. firstPRO

Headquarters: Atlanta GA

Specialties: executive search and professional placement; traditional staffing

CEO: April Nagel

Website: www.firstproinc.com

Phone: 404-252-9422

Number of full-time employees: 112

One thing that makes firstPRO a great place to work is that it recognizes staff when they work hard and meet their goals and objectives, says CEO April Nagel. The company holds a Winner's Circle luncheon once a month for every employee who makes his or her goal that month. FirstPRO also has a Rookie of the Year award for the person who has the most impressive performance during his or her first year on the job.

Additionally, firstPRO encourages staff to share their thoughts and ideas, Nagel points out. "If it makes business sense to you, odds are it's going to make business sense to us," she says.

Jared Kennedy, area manager, says, "We have managers who will listen, who will take anyone's suggestions if it makes sense. We're very fluid."

FirstPRO also has a mentorship program. Someone who has been at the company for 10 years might take someone who has been there for six months under their wing, Nagel says. "There are some short cuts that the 10-year person has learned, some tricks along the way. They can help that six-monther get further along quicker."

FirstPRO values diversity and makes a point to hire people of diverse backgrounds, Nagel points out. "We have Indian. We have African-American. We have Asian. We have everything," she says. "We have lots of different religions. ... We reflect our clientele. Our clientele is very diverse. Not only is it the

right thing to do, but also it contributes to your bottom line."

Mark Weinstein, executive VP of firstPRO's executive search division, says it's a very entrepreneurial-spirited company. Corporate has a central strategy, philosophy and culture, but there's a lot of autonomy, and people are free to try new techniques and strategies, he points out.

Susan Zingaro, executive VP of firstPRO's traditional staffing division, has been with the company for 14 years and doesn't plan on leaving anytime soon. In fact, the only way she would ever leave would be if she were fired or died, she says, noting that, "The atom bomb couldn't get me out."

What's kept her at the company so long? "It's not just the people I report to but [also] the people I work with," she says. She adds that, "The level of professionalism that we treat each other with is absolutely outstanding. There's a lot of internal respect for each other."

Zingaro likes the fact that there are opportunities for advancement at firstPRO, and that she has been able to climb the ladder. "Ninety-five percent of promotions are from within," she says. "Everyone on our executive team was a recruiter at some point. We work our way up. We are promoted as we go along."

Zingaro herself started out as an administrator, and then became a branch manager and director of operations before holding her current position, which she has held for eight years. "I love it and so does anyone who has ever been promoted," she says. "Every one of our managers was a previous recruiter."

Mike Stanziola, business development manager for firstPRO, says he likes that he is given the freedom to use the tools the company has provided and the freedom to work on his own. He also likes that the company provides him with guidance, accountability and training – three things he needs to succeed. And finally, he likes the fact that the people he works with are like-minded and goal-driven. "They want to succeed and do it by means of integrity," he says.

10. CHG Healthcare

Headquarters: Salt Lake City UT

Specialties: healthcare staffing

CEO: Mike Weinholtz

Website: www.chghealthcare.com

Phone: 800-466-0637

Number of full-time employees: 1,100

CHG must be doing something right. Twenty-eight people have been with the company 10 years or more, and 12 have been with the company 20 years, according to CEO Mike Weinholtz.

What makes CHG such a great place to work? The company has a core value of putting people first, Weinholtz says. Some companies say they put people first, but CHG actually walks the walk.

CHG understands that things arise in employees' personal and family lives and provides them with the flexibility and work/life balance they are looking for in these situations. Perhaps you need to leave for a doctor's appointment. Or maybe your son or daughter is sick and you need to stay home, or you want to leave early to see your son or daughter's play or soccer game. Some companies aren't very understanding when these things arise, but at CHG it's not a problem. "We understand and acknowledge the importance of family," says COO Scott Beck. In fact, CHG does such a good job in the area of work/life balance that it received an award for it last year from the Utah Department of Workforce Services.

Additionally, CHG provides its employees with a great deal of training. In fact, it was ranked among the Top 125 companies in the world for training by Training Magazine, according to Don DeCamp, the company's chief people officer.

CHG also does a good job of communicating with employees. "There's never a question of what's going on and how people are thinking about it," says Beck. "There's a high level of communication. All of our cards are on the table. We don't have anything to hide."

Weinholtz created Open Mike, a blog in which staff can ask any questions they want about the company and about Weinholtz himself – and he'll provide a truthful answer. He puts his own comments on the blog, and employees are free to respond to that as well.

CHG cares about its employees' health and well-being. The company has a gym at its headquarters that employees can use for just \$2 per paycheck or \$4 per month. Each year, CHG also does a Rock Your Body fitness challenge that helps employees achieve their health and fitness goals.

At CHG, if an employee has an observation, concern or complaint relating to ethical conduct, he or she can call the company's ethics hotline, Silent Whistle, or send the information to a secure email address. Both are managed by an outside third party to assure confidentiality and anonymity. The third party then communicates any employee reports to the company's ethics committee.

Every year, CHG employees participate in an anonymous, confidential survey conducted by a third party that asks them how the company can be a better place to work. Then CHG makes changes based on the results of the survey.

Julyn Terry, a training manager at CHG who has been with the company for 14 years, says one of the things she likes is that she has been able to climb the ladder. She started doing photocopies for CHG as a teenager and has worked her way up. "I had great leaders along the way who never tried to squash my development," she says. Terry also likes that CHG allows employees to telecommute. She has been telecommuting once a week for the past two years, ever since her son was born.

And she likes that CHG has a tuition reimbursement program, which she personally took advantage of when she was in college. "I really do love this company," she says. "I have never really wanted to work anywhere else because I have been completely satisfied."

Zakrey Coon, placing manager at CompHealth, a division of CHG, says one thing he likes about working for the company is that he can control his destiny as far as pay. "I am not capped by pay. I can choose my salary by putting in the effort. I can make what I want to make."

Not only does CHG "pay phenomenal" but also it reinvests profits back into the company, and that makes for a better work environment, Coon says. "I have every resource I could need or ever ask for to do my job. Even now, with the economy, the company is still reinvesting in people, resources and training. They're constantly reinvesting."

On a scale of 1 to 10, Coon gives CHG a 10. "I know what other companies are like out there and nothing compares. ... I have confidence in the direction the company is headed and that it has a vision and a plan. I trust the upper management. That comforts me."