



# America's **Best** Companies and How They Do It

By Jim Sirbasku

**O**rganizations that are flourishing in this economy must have it easy, right? You know which ones they are. Their products and/or services are always in demand. If economic downturns have touched them, it's not apparent to the outside world. In fact, they're the envy of the rest of the world and have many people asking, "Can we start selling what they are selling?"

The most important question is not what are they selling, but how are they succeeding.

We have answers for you right here, taken from Profiles research. What we have learned, from studying hundreds of America's best companies and conducting interviews with their top leaders, is that productive people play a large part in making these organizations go. These companies make the job look easy because their management of people is part of a well-executed plan.

Our survey included more than 1,600 publicly traded U.S. companies and helped reveal the practices that enable them to out-produce their colleagues down the street or across the country. Here are five common traits of America's best organizations:

**1.** Their cultures are driven by performance, and this performance is the result of an understanding shared by the company's top leaders. Leaders not only understand the current culture, but they know what the company will look and feel like, and how it will operate, next year and in 10 years. They work as a team and have the skills, tools, and experience to bring in only the people who will best fit their culture. They have the courage to reject even highly qualified workers who aren't a good match to the culture.

**2.** Top managers are highly effective. The managers of top U.S. companies are not only personally successful, but they also ensure that the individuals for whom they take responsibility are successful, too. The effectiveness of these managers flows from natural talent, and it requires them to communicate, lead others, adapt quickly to change, skillfully build personal relationships, manage tasks with efficiency, take action that gets results, and develop others as well as themselves.

Top companies know what it takes to select, train, and retain top managers.

**3.** High-performance companies accomplish more work with fewer people because they know exactly what everyone does at work. This requires that managers have a clear view of their mission and that they never get off-track on other tasks. Highly effective companies scrutinize each request for new positions. They expect more from every employee, asking them to arrive at work on time or early. Quitting time is dictated by the completion of the work, not by the hands of the clock. If someone is doing work that is ancillary to the most important tasks, effective leaders look at ways to streamline it.

As reluctant as leaders of these top organizations are to create new positions, they are eager to invest in technology and training if it means more efficient use of people and less job creation. Running lean and mean turns them into flexible work athletes who can easily handle special projects, seasonal high demands,

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unplanned worker absences, and other surprises. They are cross-trained to do more than one job. When new people come on board, selection and training processes ensure they are productive from the start.

**4.** They achieve goals at the employee level, which translates to results at the organizational level. With objectives and goals clearly defined, and performance measures aligned to match, employees focus on what matters most. The employee selection process is designed to bring in employees who best fit the job, match the team, and are compatible with their managers. If lack of skill leads to reduced performance, the organization provides training to close the gap.

Companies whose employees are reaching their goals are more likely to be those that have invested in ergonomic furniture and other necessities that enhance employee comfort. They know that reducing injuries and increasing workplace comfort enhances worker satisfaction and productivity.



**5.** Top companies stress innovation. This doesn't mean that they clamor for blockbuster ideas; they are more likely to encourage increased efficiency by fine-tuning products or processes. Small and continued growth is more realistic and less expensive than the occasional "big idea" that turns heads for a short time.

But just as important, these companies encourage the exchange of ideas among employees, managers, and top leaders with an open communication style that empowers everyone. And they act quickly on good ideas by putting them into action because they know that inaction is counterproductive. **N**

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