

SPOTLIGHT ON LEADERSHIP

UNIVERSITY of
DAYTON

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP &
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THE GREAT WORKPLACE: KEY STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

UD CLED: What led you to your interest in great places to work?

JENNIFER ROBIN: Personally, I had been following the FORTUNE best companies to work for list for several years before I heard an expert speak about what it meant to be a great workplace — one where employees trust those they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with. Once I heard the message of the Great Place to Work® Institute, it shifted my perspective on what organizations could be to their employees, their customers, and to society at large. Thus, I began my work with the Institute, and my interest in studying great workplaces has not waned since.

UD CLED: What are the greatest challenges facing employers?

ROBIN: To some extent, the challenges have not changed in 2012. Employers still need to create strong cultures that attract the best and brightest work force, and then engage and support employees in producing bottom-line business results. But, now more than ever, I believe organizations need to realize that the workplace experience doesn't sit outside of the company's strategic goals. Rather, the workplace is fundamental to achieving them. The days of seeing culture as an "initiative" that has its own budget line item are over. Companies must change how they do what they currently do in order to build stronger trust, pride and camaraderie rather than creating more programs and perks.

UD CLED: What concerns are organizations raising with you in regards to creating strong cultures?

ROBIN: This is actually the topic of Michael's and my next project — looking at the challenges leaders and managers face when trying to create a great workplace. We've identified several tactical challenges, such as geographic dispersion, nature of the workforce, and industry standards. But, we also believe any company can be a great place to work. Fundamentally, it involves an organization's sense of identity, the philosophies and attitudes of its leaders, and its willingness to overcome challenges to improving culture.

UD CLED: What are employees looking for when selecting a great place to work?

ROBIN: Of course, employees look for a company that can meet their needs on a tactical level — pay, location, career opportunities. But, ultimately, I believe employees thrive in a place where their work is meaningful. Being able to produce

their best work for a company they see as contributing positively to the world means the employee gets to change the world by virtue of working there.

UD CLED: What does it take to become a great place to work?

ROBIN: There are really two answers to this question. To become recognized as a great workplace, they begin by applying! Information on the application process can be found here: www.greatplacetowork.com/best-companies/about-applying-to-best-companies-lists. But, to be a great place to work, employees need to experience trust, pride, and camaraderie, and leaders need to create environments where employees can do that.

UD CLED: Research shows that people generally leave their manager vs. their company. What can a leader do to retain their best employees?

ROBIN: There are so many, but one of the most fundamental would be to recognize the strengths of each employee and how he or she contributes to the organization. An easy way to do this would be when saying thank you. Instead of just thanking an employee for a job well done, thank her for bringing x, y, and z skills to the task. This practice alone does three things. First, it shows you see the employee as a person and not just an employee. Second, it provides support and builds respect. And third, it invites open and honest communication when you customize the message you send to the individual employee.

UD CLED: What was the last thing you read?

ROBIN: Lately, I've been reading many more articles than I have books. I just pulled out a classic called *Teaching Smart People How to Learn* by Chris Argyris that was published in 1991 in the *Harvard Business Review*. It was great to revisit the idea of double-loop learning — how to surface the assumptions that hold problems in place rather than simply going about the business of trying to solve them.

UD CLED: What advice would you give to new leaders?

ROBIN: To adopt the philosophy that every action you take either builds trust or breaks it down. Whether that statement is actually a truth is less important than the behaviors that come from treating it as one. If you attend to the "how" of what it is you do and ensure that it demonstrates credibility, respect, and fairness, you are well on your way to building a great workplace.

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