

First in a Series of Articles on  
"Great Christian Workplaces!"

# The BEST Christian Places To Work

## The Seven Best Practices That Define Great Christian Workplaces!

By Al Lupus



**H**ave you ever wondered how your workplace compares to other Christian ministries and organizations? Would you like to know what the keys are to creating a highly successful Christian work environment? Participants in the first Best Christian Places to Work program received answers to these questions and more.

Sponsored by *Christianity Today* magazine in conjunction with the Best Christian Workplaces Institute (BCWI) and Christian Management Association (CMA), this survey was the largest and broadest study ever conducted on the attitudes of employees of Christian organizations—85 organizations participated, with 8,700 employees completing an online survey representing more than 15,000 Christian workers.

The goal of the program was to highlight Christian organizations having exceptional people practices, and to encourage greater stewardship of human resources within the body of Christ. After scores were tallied and reviewed by a panel of four independent judges (who were not given the identities of the organizations), the top 40 Best Christian Places to Work were selected and announced at CMA's annual leadership and management conference in Colorado Springs, Colo., Feb. 24-27, 2003.

Organizations employing more than 15 employees with a Christian mission were eligible to participate—including organizations with a Christian service or product. For this first year, we limited participation to U.S.-based organizations and excluded churches.

The participating organizations were classified into 10 categories based on industry and size, including missions and parachurch organizations, media companies (book publishers, radio, etc.), institutions of higher education, service and product organizations, and private Christian schools.

In nearly all categories, four finalists were chosen out of eight or nine participants, highlighting the top organizations in each category. As the survey broadens in scope and size, we expect the categories will change based on participation.

### Best Practice Discoveries

What were some of the main discoveries from the study? Finalists in the survey exhibit seven key characteristics:

**1. Passion for the mission.** In the top Best Christian Places to Work,

employees are deeply engaged with their organization's mission. At first-place finalist for large missions/parachurch organizations, Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO), the mission is "Transforming College Students to Transform the World." What's remarkable about CCO's results is all but four of the 147 employees surveyed say they're passionate about their work, while 90 percent *strongly* agree that they have a good understanding of their mission and goals.

"In the past couple of years, we've clarified our purpose," says area director Barbara Courtney. "This has unified our efforts in ministry and given all our staff members a clear understanding of how their role moves our mission forward to serve college students."

CCO's mission of "transforming the world" provides a great sense of accomplishment, which is true in many other successful ministries.

**2. Kneel first to change the world.** Not only are the employees of these finalists passionate about their Christian mission, they also appreciate the spirituality and fellowship that comes with working in a Christian environment.

At the headquarters of Medical Ambassadors International (MAI), prayer is a priority. Denise Locker, marketing and communications manager, says, "The reason I think [MAI] is a great Christian place to work...is the emphasis on prayer...At MAI, prayer isn't something we say we do—we actually do it every day of the week."

Prayer is in fact included as one of MAI's core values, and thus, it's not a surprise that 100 percent of employees surveyed expressed satisfaction with the level of Christian spirituality and prayer. In addition, the emphasis on prayer also correlated with how the employees rated their leaders' display of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, kindness, etc.). Once again, 100 percent of those surveyed felt their leaders exhibited these gifts.

## 2003's Best Christian Places to Work Finalists

### Large Missions and Parachurch Organizations

1. Coalition for Christian Outreach (Pittsburgh, Pa.)
2. SIM USA (Charlotte, N.C.)
3. Bible League (Chicago, Ill.)
4. International Bible Society (Colorado Springs, Colo.)

### Small Missions and Parachurch Organizations

1. Medical Ambassadors Intl. (headquarters) (Modesto, Calif.)
2. New Mission Systems Intl. (Fort Myers, Fla.)
3. Team Expansion (Louisville, Ky.)
4. Partners Intl. (Spokane, Wash.)

### Large Service and Product Organizations

1. Evangelical Christian Credit Union (Brea, Calif.)
2. Association of Christian Schools, Intl. (Colorado Springs, Colo.)
3. Dayspring Cards (Siloam Springs, Ark.) and Shepherds Ministries (Union Grove, Wis.) (tied)

### Small Service and Product Organizations

1. Christian Medical and Dental Associations (Bristol, Tenn.)
2. Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (Washington, D.C.)
3. Whitehead, Phillipi & Harris (Pennel, Pa.)
4. The DeMoss Group (Duluth, Ga.)

### Large Colleges, Universities and Seminaries

1. Whitworth College (Spokane, Wash.)
2. Spring Arbor University (Spring Arbor, Mich.)
3. Moody Bible Institute (Chicago, Ill.)
4. Cedarville University (Cedarville, Ohio)

### Medium Colleges, Universities and Seminaries

1. Dallas Theological Seminary (Dallas, Texas) and Multnomah Bible College and Seminary (Portland, Ore.) (tied)
2. Western Baptist College (Salem, Ore.) and Bryan College (Dayton, Tenn.) (tied)

### Small Colleges, Universities and Seminaries

1. Phoenix Seminary (Scottsdale, Ariz.)
2. Beeson Divinity School (Birmingham, Ala.)
3. Assemblies of God Theological Seminary (Springfield, Mo.)
4. Denver Seminary (Englewood, Colo.)

### Large Media Organizations

1. Group Publishing (Loveland, Colo.)
2. Zondervan (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
3. Tyndale House (Carol Stream, Ill.)
4. Multnomah Publishers (Sisters, Ore.)

### Small Media Organizations

1. Howard Publishing (West Monroe, La.)
2. Paraclete Press (Orleans, Mass.)
3. InterVarsity Press (Westmont, Ill.)
4. Far East Broadcasting (La Mirada, Calif.)

### Private Christian Schools

1. Covenant Christian High School (Indianapolis, Ind.)
2. Christian Heritage Academy (Northfield, Ill.)
3. High Point Christian Academy (High Point, N.C.)
4. King's Way Christian School (Vancouver, Wash.)

**3. Build trust through transformational leadership.** At the core of successful human relationships is trust. Through our research, we found that employee perceptions of trust levels between themselves and their senior managers were a critical factor for satisfaction.

On Toby Hoffman's first day at Evangelical Christian Credit Union (first-place finalist among large service and product organizations), he met CEO Mark Holbrook. "When we came in, he...told me he had heard about me and was so happy to have me on board. He didn't have to read a note card or have anyone introduce me to him. He already knew me by name," says Hoffman. "Since then, I've only grown more impressed with the core values, employee relationships, and attitude of the executive staff."

ECCU received consistently high scores from employees in the areas of trust, ethics, employee commitment and being well-managed. It accomplishes this by demonstrating honesty and compassion for all, as well as inviting employee involvement and diversity in the workplace, which we found are all key drivers for achieving and sustaining high levels of trust in a Christian organization.

**4. Create energy for action.** At the Christian Medical and Dental Association (CMDA), employees know their management listens to their suggestions and acts on them. Ninety-eight percent of CMDA employees feel their leaders *seek* their suggestions, and an overwhelming 96 percent say they *act* on their suggestions.

These management behaviors encourage employees to perform and achieve their organization's mission and goals. As a result, CMDA employees exhibit high commitment levels to the company.

Director of stewardship George Courtney says, "I've found more personal fulfillment working for this company than I could ever express." And more than just a commitment to work, these employees greatly enjoy the opportunity to be with one another, finding ways to make "work" more like fun.

"In the home office, the staff is very close," says Jennifer Pickel, media and research assistant. "I feel the love' from co-workers, especially when we party. The parties here are on a level all their

own—sometimes I think we could actually start our own business!”

CMDA employees aren't just waiting for Friday to come—they look forward to Monday.

**5. Hire excellence.** At Covenant Christian High School, every employee strongly agrees that the school hires highly qualified employees. And to top that, every employee thinks it retains these employees.

Says teacher Yvonne Thompson, “I’ve never worked with professionals and administrators who are as committed to excellence as they are here.” When organizations spend the time and effort it takes to make sure their employees are the right fit and caliber, everybody benefits. The resulting mutual respect that exists in the workplace helps to keep motivation and morale high, as an “iron sharpens iron” atmos-

phere permeates the organization.

“I pinch myself that I’m able to work in such an amazing environment,” says guidance assistant Noreen Davis.

**6. Establish a stewardship culture.** The leaders of Group Publishing have built an intentional process of communication, stewardship and accountability into the company culture, resulting in a magnetic, fun workplace where people work hard and feel cared for, regardless of position or job description.

A core element of this culture is its formal Personal Development Plan (PDP) for employees. The plan is a written document of personal goals and objectives that employees review annually with their leaders. Special attention is given to aligning each individual’s goals with the organization’s strategic plan and departmental goals. In addition to goals and objectives, the plan contains individual

learning objectives and recommends specific learning activities.

To facilitate the learning process, the organization has created “Group University,” which offers 65 training and development opportunities. For example, CEO Thom Schultz teaches a core course for all new staff members called, “*The Oz Principle—Making it Happen at Group*,” which helps introduce Group employees to the culture of stewardship and responsibility.

As a result of these efforts on the leadership’s part, Group employees demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with their jobs. Group’s workplace is reminiscent of Jesus’ parable of the talents, in which proper stewardship of one’s resources leads to a multiplication of results.

**7. Show commitment through tangible benefits.** A core element for nearly

## The Origins of the Best Christian Places to Work

By Helen Lee, cofounder, Best Christian Workplaces Institute

When I was a student at the Babson College MBA program, one of my favorite classes was a course called “Strategic Human Resources.” There, for the first time, I was introduced to the concept of human resources as being the source of competitive advantage within an organization—and yet it seemed very few organizations grasped this concept, preferring instead to focus on their strategies or products for success.

Having previously worked at two well-known Christian organizations, I found myself wondering if the Christian evangelical world could lay claim to having the best human resource management practices. Theologically, it seemed appropriate to expect that Christian organizations would reflect God’s care for and stewardship of every individual through their people practices, but I wanted to know if this was happening in reality.

So an idea was born: what if there were an annual study, much like what *Fortune* does with secular companies in its “100 Best Companies to Work For” feature, that would specifically focus on Christian organizations? If we could highlight those organizations with

exceptional human resource management and make this a higher priority for all evangelical ministries, I imagined that one day Christian companies would indeed be the standard-bearer among all organizations, Christian and secular, in the area of people practices.

In early 2002, CMA president John Pearson connected me with an experienced human resource consultant, Al Lopus, who had run similar studies in the Pacific Northwest. Together we formed the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, with the purpose of helping Christian organizations strengthen and improve their human resource practices, for the glory of the Kingdom.

With funding from *Christianity Today* (CT) and support from CMA, we were able to launch this first Best Christian Places to Work study last September. Nearly 1,000 letters went out to invite organizations to participate, followed by numerous phone calls, advertisements in CT and promotional assistance from Christian trade associations. We kept our hopes conservative, thinking we might reach 50 participants this first year, resulting in a Top 10 or 20 list. Then the registrations started coming in.

More than 150 companies expressed interest in our study, some of which were excluded due to our focused eligibility requirements for this first survey. One hundred and thirteen organizations, including many well-known and key Christian ministries, began the process, with a final 85 completing all requirements.

Given this year’s very tight timeline, and the fact that this was a completely new concept, we were extremely pleased with the participation levels and results. The quality of the finalists met our goal to highlight exceptional workplaces, and our hope is that the entire Christian body has become more aware of the importance of their human resource practices.

We’re not content to stop here, however; our hope is that this is just the beginning of many Best Christian Places to Work surveys to come. And if your organization is one that takes exceptional care with its human resource management, please contact the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. We’d welcome your participation in a future survey.

# How the Best Were Selected—the Survey Methodology

This year's Best Christian Places to Work were assessed on the basis of three components: an employee survey and an organization profile developed by The Best Christian Workplaces Institute, as well as employee participation rates.

The employee surveys were available online through a customized website and were completed anonymously; we requested high participation rates from each organization to ensure results with a low margin of error. A total of 85 organizations participated in the entire process with nearly 8,700 employees completing the survey. The organizations were divided into 10 categories

based on size and type of organization (media, missions/parachurch, higher education, etc.).

Participating organizations were scored in six dimensions, such as "Rewards and Benefits," and "Motivation and Commitment." Each dimension had separate scores from the employee surveys and from the organization profile. In the benefits category, for example, organizations were asked to identify specific offerings and their value, while employee questions were aimed at determining their satisfaction level about their benefits in general. Once the raw scores were computed for each of these dimensions, the data went to four judges who made

the final determinations.

The judges—to whom we express our gratitude—exercised their independent assessment in the selection and ranking of the finalists. To ensure complete objectivity, code numbers were used rather than organization names in the judging process.

The 2003 judges were: John Pearson, president & CEO of Christian Management Association, Philip W. Eaton, president of Seattle Pacific University, Olan Hendrix, CEO of Leadership Resource Group, and a fourth executive who wishes to remain anonymous.

all the 85 participating organizations was a comprehensive employee benefit program. However, as expected, employee satisfaction levels for the benefit programs at finalist organizations

were higher than non-finalists, across the board, in areas such as retirement, paid holiday and vacation benefits.

Finalist organizations contribute nearly one percent more pay toward retire-

ment (5.3 percent on average), one more paid holiday (10 days on average), and more vacations days than non-finalists. In addition, employee satisfaction levels for medical benefits were higher among finalists than non-finalists.

By providing better-than-average benefits programs to their employees and their families, Christian organizations can demonstrate commitment to those employees, which will also result in greater commitment from them.

The Best Christian Places to Work survey has provided us with a rich database of quantitative information we're using to identify the best people practices among Christian organizations. We've highlighted seven practices that define excellence for many of the successful organizations. It's our hope you're encouraged to learn how to make your organization more fruitful through these examples.

*This is the first in a series of articles on the findings from The Best Christian Places to Work survey data. For more information on the winners, see Christianity Today's article at [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/108/52.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/108/52.0.html).*

*Additional reporting by Helen Lee.*

**Al Lopus** is executive director and co-founder of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. He previously served in several leadership roles with the global human resource consulting firm, Watson Wyatt. He may be reached at (206) 230-8605, email [alopus@bcwinstitute.com](mailto:alopus@bcwinstitute.com), or visit [www.bcwinstitute.com](http://www.bcwinstitute.com).

**Our ministry is serving your ministry**  
**How Can We Serve You?**

**It's about ministry.**  
 Christian Retirement Coalition is an international benefits ministry that offers retirement plans, individual and group benefits, and investment options with a biblical/financial stewardship perspective.

**It's about people.**  
 Christian organizations and ministry professionals (employees) worldwide use CRC's services — and so can you! Most plans are available at little or no cost to your organization!

**It's about service.**  
 No matter what your needs, you can count on simplified administration, a variety of plans, service excellence and ongoing support/education.

- Variety of plans: 401(k), 403(b), IRAs
- Group Health, Life, Dental, Vision LTC, Disability, Flex Accounts
- Tax-free savings for education or retirement
- Plans for foreign nationals

**Christian Retirement Coalition**  
 5350 Tomah Drive, Suite 2500  
 Colorado Springs, CO 80918  
 (888) 879-1376  
[orc@creministries.org](mailto:orc@creministries.org)  
[www.creministries.org](http://www.creministries.org)

Christian Retirement Coalition  
 An International Benefits Ministry  
 Serving Ministers and Ministry Professionals

Advisory Services and Securities offered through Lincoln Investment Planning, Inc. Registered Investment Advisor  
 Member NASD, SIPC.  
 Group benefits and consulting offered through Lincoln Benefits Group (Not affiliated with Lincoln Investment Planning, Inc.)

**Our Ministry is Serving Your Ministry**