

“The Best Place to Work”

- In this book, Ron Friedman (the author) talks about what different companies are doing to make their employees happier and more productive.
- By improving the workplace environment, employees can thrive and produce higher-quality or faster output (which benefits companies).
- This could be in their practices and habits, all the way to more physical features like the workplace interior design.
- Personal note: Ron basically does what I'd love to do. He consults companies on how to improve their workplace environment.

Workplace Physical Design

- (When you get financially rich enough to do this) Design a new office space with the END IN MIND.
- Be very intentional about what you're designing and why. Also invite the teammates to pitch in some ideas of what would help the design align with the company's values.
- “cave” vs “campfire”.
- Have open spaces overlooking nature and wide areas (while people are working and trying to focus on individual tasks that require deep, focused thought).
- Have more communal, enclosed spaces (while people are hanging out together or coming up with crazy ideas)
- Access to sunlight and windows.
- Getting to see landscapes and natural objects (whether real, or even through pictures/images).
 - Microsoft has these crazy-dope [tree houses](#) in the woods for employees to meet and talk



- Tall areas with high ceilings are good for inspiring people (think Sistine Chapel, Taj Mahal, Sean Stein Pavilion)



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- (Pixar's offices)

- Google and Cisco design their office campuses to be more like college campuses. There's a lot of things to see and do, and lots of different people to meet.
- Employees may not necessarily need "offices" where they sit at a desk and work. Instead, they might choose a few different locations around the campus that suit them well at different times of the day.
- What if we let teammates work from home and decorate their home "offices" (or whatever space they have) however they want?



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- (Pixar's offices)
- [Other ideas](#)

- But we don't give them an office at the actual workplace. On some days, maybe they want to meet their friends or collaborate more, or they just want a change of space or wish to explore something new. When they're at the campus, things are more open and free (like a college campus).

- We could also have living quarters for employees who want to stay near where they work (“dorms”). [Google, Apple, and Facebook](#) are doing this for their employees.

Pride

- Find ways to make employees proud of what they’re doing at the company. They should be proud about what they’re working on, and proud to know that they’re a part of this company. It could be that they’re proud of its values, and what it stands for, and the type of impact they’re able to have.
- Some employees might become arrogant about the fact that they’re a part of some company. For them, being at the company is a means to satisfying a status lift (e.g. their parents want them to work at that company because of its reputation, they just want to brag about where they work).
- That’s why it’s important to find employees whose values actually MATCH your company values. Your company values should be distinct, different, in some way.
- This way, you know that they’re actually a good fit and that they’d also be prideful about what values the company represents and the impact it hopes to make, and not about the company’s status itself.
- “I love working at Polka Box because I love what we try to do, and the kind of impact we aim to have on the world.”
- Vs
- “I’m working at Polka Box because it’s a well-known company, and I’m hoping it’ll be a good name to have on my resume when I try to apply to other well-known companies (e.g. Apple, Google, SpaceX) down the line.”
- You can probably find out a prospective hire’s values based on what work they’ve done (listed on resume), and their motivations for doing those tasks

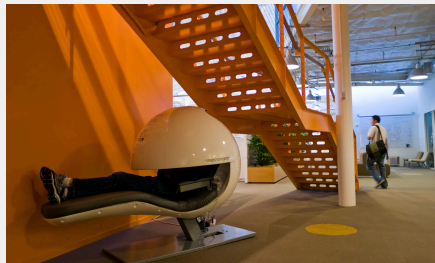
Encouraging Failure

- What if we ask prospective hires to also send over a “failure CV/resume”, or a “Lessons Learned CV/resume”? They can highlight what stuff they worked on, what mistakes they made, what they learned from what didn’t work out.
- It shows that they’re open to being vulnerable about their mistakes and they’re not afraid of failure — or learning new things outside their range of comfort. Things don’t always have to turn out successful.
- Usually, failure happens when you try and learn new things (unless you were just lazy and didn’t actually care about what you were doing. But that may lead to something better that you worked on after because you realized it wasn’t actually that fun for you — so you still made PROGRESS).
- It’s usually much later that you end up succeeding. Always requiring people to succeed puts pressure on them to put only glowing accomplishments on their resumes.
- It also likely causes people to think small or do what others are doing, in that they’ll only do things that they know will guarantee them success. After all, if it doesn’t work out, then it would’ve been a waste of time since they can’t put it on their resume.
- “Those who can’t seem to identify any mistakes are presumably told they now have something to put on future applications.”

- (For yourself, but you can also encourage other teammates to do it) ASK: “What new thing did I try today, and what did I learn?”
- Notice I didn’t put “things”. It doesn’t *have* to be more than one. Even if you did one new thing in the day, that’s something to be proud of. As long as you did *something*.

Disconnecting from work to do other stuff

- Some successful companies (e.g. Google, Amazon, Microsoft) emphasize the importance of taking breaks in-between work.
- Lots of times, it’s important to not be constantly working. Connections that are helpful to generate creative, imaginative, out-of-the-box, innovative ideas are often formed when we’re *not* actively grinding our head against the task.
- Some things that employees can do for these breaks are to take walks, play sports (many offices have ping-pong tables), exercise, eat snacks, read, and take naps.



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- [Google's Nap Pods](#)

- Encourage employees to do other things that they’re passionate about and that they find helpful for improving their performance. Emphasize growth.
- If an employee believes that napping will help improve their output, then let them nap. The main thing is that the employee should be mature enough to track their output and evaluate for themselves as to whether they’re improving. If they see that napping doesn’t actually help them that much, then they would stop on their own.
- Basically, it’s important to have stellar, talented, passionate teammates who’re willing to experiment and try out new things because they WANT to improve their performance. They have a desire to work better because they know that they’ll contribute more. They implement practices that they find makes them work better.
- (There should be the implicit assumption amongst all teammates that since a teammate was hired, they must be good enough to handle the job.)
- For teammates who know that certain practices are helpful for their work, it’s important to provide them with the ability to continue practicing those.
- For example, I find that taking walks outside, working out, eating healthy meals, reading, and spending time with others is helpful for me and allows me to work better.
- So I’ll naturally want to work in an environment where that’s all possible. However, not all companies like the idea of employees spending time doing things that make it look like they’re not working.
- It helps to have dedicated spaces where people can do things other than work — for example, some companies have libraries, swimming pools, basketball and volleyball courts, dining halls, and nap rooms.

- However, the MORE IMPORTANT thing is that there's a culture where employees are free to do these things without having to take permission. It doesn't matter that a company has a ping-pong table if employees are frowned upon when using it.
- For companies that don't have very big offices — even in a small space, an employee should be able to freely read, work, nap, or eat a snack while taking a break away from their computer. Nobody should be questioning why they're doing what they're doing, or look down upon it.
- There should be enough trust in the teammates that people can do what they need to do with a free mind, unburdened by social pressure. This trust is present because the teammate has already demonstrated themselves to be more talented than most others.
- If people are already smart and have clearly demonstrated a capacity to do fantastic work that very few people are able to do, then it's obvious that they're doing things like napping, reading, etc. not because they're lazy, but because it helps them.
- Employees shouldn't have to deal with work matters (like answering emails or messages) when they're not in their work mode.
- Some companies shut off their email/chat server after work hours. I believe Slack does something like this.
- Each employee should be allowed to have their own "Airplane Mode" for when they're attending to a different task other than their work. When this "Airplane Mode" is ON, then they won't get messages or emails from others that may take them away. When the employee is done with their other task and returns to work ("Airplane Mode" is OFF), then they can see what work messages they've missed.
- When an employee is at the gym, at home spending time with family, eating meals, etc, then they should be focused on those tasks — not work.
- UNLESS there's an emergency. There could be a feature where an employee can push an urgent message over to another employee that's currently on Airplane Mode in case of an emergency.
- There should be enough trust in an employee that they're sensible enough to only alert others while on their Airplane Mode when a random, unexpected crisis may happen (e.g. the office is on fire). Employees should be mature enough to respect other people's privacy at all other times.
- The same thing goes for vacations. Some companies — like IBM, Netflix, Modernizing Medicine — offer unlimited PTO. (I would rather call it "flexible PTO". Unlimited sounds misleading)
- Teammates should be allowed to take vacations when they feel the need or want to. Again, if they're talented, driven, passionate about their work, and already have the right values, then there should be enough trust that they know what they're doing.
- While in office, Barack Obama made sure to:
 - Exercise six days a week for 45 minutes each each day
 - Fit basketball and golf into his weekly schedule
 - Read history and nonfiction, along with fiction and poetry
 - Take at least one month of total holidays off each year

- (One interesting point that I found interesting for myself that Friedman mentioned in the book is that mornings are a good time to absorb new info, whereas as the day gets older and you get tired, it gets better to let your mind reflect and come up with connections.)

Making employees best friends

- Employees who have best friends at their current companies are less likely to leave (e.g. Jim Halpert didn't want to leave Dunder Mifflin because of Pam)
- One thing that helps improve employee relationships is when people help each other out a lot, at work and also outside of work
- Being vulnerable, sharing secrets or personal info because they trust others
- The more you hang out outside of work and do fun stuff together, the more likely it is for this to happen
- Employees should do fun stuff that they'd all enjoy (based on common values) outside of work as well
- Keeping things fresh and unexpected, doing new stuff together, are good ways to keep the fire lit

Building a fun group of friends

- Make traditions. Something that's unique to your company. Old employees look forward to it because they remember them fondly. New employees look forward to them because they're curious.
- Bonus point for if they involve family. It's a good chance to increase the circle, meet new people, and also compliment a team member in front of their partner/spouse/kids.
- For example, maybe some companies have quarterly get-togethers in which there's a potluck and families can also join.
- "At Plante Moran, employees take breaks in the warm months to enjoy ice cream together, and share apple cider and doughnuts when the temperature drops. Summertime barbecues, fall clambakes, Halloween pumpkin-carving contests, and winter chili cook-offs are just a sampling of seasonal events that can quickly become office traditions."
- Variety is the spice of life. Remember to do fun, different, new things from time to time. Not too often, or else they become distracting. But enough that teammates are happy to be trying and learning new things from time to time.
- For example, maybe you can go out to dinner with the team at a different restaurant at the end of each week.
- Or maybe you can try online group events like Airbnb Virtual Experiences or other such novelties (which would be more helpful during a pandemic) once a month.
- Friedman mentioned that having small, frequent bonuses is more effective than having large, infrequent bonuses. (But if you can, I think choosing both is best.)
- For example, spacing weekend getaways throughout the year is more rewarding than only having one large, two-week vacation in the year.
- Or, having small quarterly gatherings is more rewarding than simply burning all the cash on one large annual gathering.

- Take time to remember the accomplishments that were made from the beginning till now. Encourage others to do the same.
- Do this during more formal meet ups or celebrations. It could be good to do this when a milestone or goal has been met.
- Sometimes, it can be so easy to get caught up in work that you don't remember all the progress that you've actually made. When this happens, you don't recognize progress (however small or large) and end up feeling like nothing's really happened.
- Recognizing what was achieved reminds teammates of what they accomplished and how they grew. It also pumps them up to tackle the next set of challenges that they'll be getting.
- It's also important to remember the lessons learned and mistakes made that teammates have GROWN from. By trying new things, what was learned? What mistakes were made that can be avoided for the future? What progress was made or can be made?
- "Connecting employees with end customers can have a powerful motivating effect." Employees get to directly see the fruits of their efforts and the impact it's had on others.

Vulnerability

- It helps to be vulnerable with friends. The more you learn about them, their strengths, and what they're comfortable talking about — the more you can ask them for their help or thoughts on things that you feel they're knowledgeable or competent about.
- As a result, they trust and like you more (since you've shown that you trust them) and they also feel good because they're being called upon to do an important task which even calls for their strengths.
- "When all you do at the office is talk shop, you might develop a reputation for being competent, but you're also not likely to end up with a whole lot of friends."
- "When we believe that those around us are able to provide social support— by offering assistance, advice, and emotional reassurance— we tend to be healthier both physically and psychologically."
- It might be a good idea to have a meet up where teammates talk about what goals they're working towards (besides work). These can be behaviors they'd like to improve upon, skills they'd like to develop, or knowledge they'd like to gain.
- In this way, other teammates can offer insights or suggestions that may help each person talking about what they're striving for.
- "Instead of feeling stuck, everyone on the team has someone with whom they can discuss their next biggest challenge, without feeling pressured to have all the answers."
- For example, I'm trying to improve my sleep quality. I can talk about what problems I'm facing regarding it, what I've tried, and where I am now. In turn, the teammates can provide their suggestions (if any) or talk about what they do.

Giving Feedback

- Provide positive feedback asap when you see an instance of behavior that you admire
- Provide feedback to improve asap when you see an instance of behavior that can be done better

- The longer you wait, the more you'll neglect to address it and the less the teammate will even remember they did something that could've been done better
- This one's a bit tricky — I'm still not sure how to appropriately do it, or in what sort of setting. It makes sense conceptually, but implementing it is going to feel weird.
- (In the case a behavior needs to be corrected) At the same time, you don't want to act in the heat of the moment. You DO want to spend some time thinking about how to best address the issue in a way that motivates the person to make the change.
- You can start with sending short, concise text messages (to praise someone or to suggest something).
- If it's really important and definitely demands more serious attention, digging in, or discussion, a phone call would likely work better.
- (Something Friedman mentioned that I thought was interesting for myself — Gossiping is fine, as it can give you an insight that there may be some internal problem that needs fixing.
- Of course, Gossiping about others in a negative way is not necessarily mature. The source of negative gossip should also be searched for, as it's an indicator that there's some issue going on with the employee who's spreading the gossip).

Hire Without Bias. What to Hire On.

- The Boston Symphony Orchestra has a pretty cool and intelligent way of "hiring", or choosing musicians to play for them.
- To remove bias, the "recruiters" don't get to see the musician or their face. They don't know the musician's race, ethnicity, or gender. When the musician comes to audition, the recruiters are on one side of a solid screen, and the musician on the other. The flooring is even padded so that recruiters can't guess the gender of the person based on how heavy the footsteps are (boy if "heavy", girl if "light")!
- The idea is to hire musicians not on how they look or where they come from, but on the quality of their performance.
- In workplaces, it's very much possible for a recruiter to unconsciously view a candidate in a biased manner.
- You're more likely to hire someone who's good-looking than someone who's not. You're more likely to hire someone who's race or ethnicity or culture is closer to yours (which you can find out based on their name). You're more likely to hire someone who's people-smart and knows how to impress over someone who doesn't.
- This makes sense. People who come from the same foreign country are more likely to get along well and connect with each other faster. And it makes sense that you'd more often trust someone who's good-looking — they put you at ease, they look more confident and capable, etc.
- However, at the same time, diversity in the workplace is also important. Different people, who come from different backgrounds and places, can bring in new, fresh ideas and ways of doing things.
- Otherwise, if everyone in the workplace is very similar to one another, then the company will resort to executing very narrow ideas without much creative inspiration or innovation.

- Having people coming in from different backgrounds who are willing to bring in new ideas encourages everyone to think more outside the box and embrace more unique solutions.
- It DOES matter that the person you're hiring isn't just smart and intelligent and has the technical skills needed to perform the role.
- Having soft skills (teamwork, collaboration, respect, empathy, emotional intelligence, communication skills, etc.) are ALSO very important.
- And it DOES help that the person's core values, habits, and practices align with your company's as well (culture fit).
- So how does a company make sure that their recruiters hire based on the RIGHT characteristics (e.g. talent and skill proficiency, soft skills, and core values fit), and not on characteristics that aren't necessarily vital but are likely to arouse unconscious bias (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, attractiveness, height, voice quality)?
 - Some sample tips and questions
 - Their name, gender, ethnicity, college attended, and photo should not be on their application. Or maybe it gets omitted when it's sent to the hirers. Each potential candidate would be identified by a number.
 - Don't talk to the candidates right away, until you're confident that you're happy with their application.
 - "What do you do to take care of your health (mental and physical), and why? What are some examples? Are there any new things you've been trying out? What are some health-related things you'd like to tackle for the future?"
 - "What do you do outside of work, and why? What are your hobbies? Are there any things you've learned from them that you can apply into your own life? How have these hobbies shaped you into who you are now?"
 - "What do you do to challenge your current assumptions and learn new things, and why do you use these methods?"
 - "What are some aspects of yourself you're improving upon? These could be personal traits that you'd like to work on or skills that you wish to build. What have you tried so far, and what are the next steps?"
 - "What are some traits or qualities about yourself that you're proud of?"
 - "What are some talents or quirky strengths about you that make you stand out amongst all others you know?"
 - "What's your dream job? What would you be doing (unless you're already doing it)?"
 - PORTFOLIO: "What are some projects/endeavors (personal or at work) you're most proud of? What motivated you to work on these? What were you able to learn and/or accomplish? What are some things you learned about yourself (if any), by working on these? If you left a job or stopped working on a project, how come? What are you working on now?"
 - "What would you like to be able to do with your talents and skills some day?"
 - Glean what pushes them to work on these things.
 - The idea is to get to know the person as much as possible BEFORE you may get influenced by unimportant characteristics after seeing them or talking to them.

- Once you've read through a person's application, if you're satisfied by it, then you can move on. The next step is to assign the person on a task and work with them on it. You want to be able to evaluate their work style, their talent, their capacity to get things done, etc — and see whether it aligns with what they wrote about on their application.
- (Something that I found interesting for myself — people with deeper, lower-pitched voices are more likely to be seen as stronger, more confident, and more capable of being leaders)
- “No matter how satisfied you are with your job, the moment someone you respect compliments your skills and says he'd like to work with you, you can't help it. You listen.”
- “Encourage interviewers to take notes during the interviews. The more we record our observations, the less likely we are to be swayed by our memories, which place too much importance on the beginning and the end of interviews.” (true)