



THINKSTOCK

OUT OF THE AMAZON

In the wake of *The New York Times* exposé on Amazon's corporate culture, pharma companies and agencies alike took a look within. Not that they'd share otherwise, but they largely liked what they saw—and are striving to keep employees as happy and satisfied as their clients. **Barbara Peck** reports

Last August the *The New York Times* published an article on workplace culture that reverberated across the country. "Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace" posited that the retail giant is "conducting an experiment in how far it can push white-collar workers to get them to achieve its ever-expanding ambitions."

The reaction was swift and virulent. With more than 5,000,000 page views, the article became one of the *Gray Lady's* most-read pieces of the year and garnered almost 6,000 comments. Readers

were shocked by tales of employees forced back to work one day after a miscarriage or edged out for taking time off to receive cancer treatments. Some readers maintained that such drive is what keeps this country competitive while many others derided it as creepy and abusive. (Two pithy comments: "Competition produced the T. Rex and the tortoise. Which one's still around?" and "All this just to sell books and toilet paper more efficiently?")

The story had lasting impact in that it prompted organizations in other industries—among them pharma and healthcare marketers—to take a look within. So how do these companies compare when it comes to workplace culture? Are their employees largely satisfied with work/life balance, or are they commonly allotting part of their afternoons to crying jags at their desks?

MORE THAN THE MONEY

Boris Kushkuley, EVP for multichannel marketing and consulting at Intouch Solutions, previously worked for a tech start-up and knows that such organizations are very different from the typical corporate American workplace. "Silicon Valley people are highly motivated, hardworking and a little crazy," he says. "That could be what makes them innovators."

As a digital agency, Intouch has many millennials on staff—which, in a way, would force the company to mind work/life considerations even if it weren't already so inclined. "They have a different perspective of the world than previous generations," says Kushkuley. "They find it easier to abandon a job and go to the next one, sometimes for a higher value that's not monetary. We treat our employees well to keep them engaged and motivated." Among the perks: a range of charitable endeavors and so-called cake days.

In defense of Amazon, Kushkuley points out that, "We need to understand that routine services won't give us the kind of innovations we want, like the world's biggest store and inventions that change our lives, like Kindle and Apple products. We're privileged to benefit from these innovations and we're not ready to give them up. It's not fair to judge the companies that make these things happen."

BOTH SIDES NOW

Having worked in both the corporate and agency realms of healthcare, Meghan Lopresto, director of customer engagement strategy at Boehringer Ingelheim, brings her own perspective to the workplace culture question. And to hear her tell it, pharma companies are closer to so-called corporate America.

"You generally have the option to walk out the door at five, with no expectation to do anything before you walk in the next morning, even checking e-mail," she says. "It's not that way at an agency, where you're at the client's beck and call. Once you get accustomed to how things operate on the agency side, it's hard to transition to something different. You miss that intense environment, the constant sense of urgency."

But after ping-ponging between agency and client gigs, Lopresto plans to stay put at BI. "This company is very focused on helping employees maintain physical and mental health," she says. "BI makes it easy for employees to stay healthy. We practice what we preach

by offering flu shots, mammograms and skin-cancer screenings." The company, Lopresto adds, has numerous recognition programs, including a monthly "Rock Star" award in the marketing department.

Lopresto admits that when she read about the tears shed at Amazon, her first reaction was, "Oh my God—this is my agency job! The agency business is tough—there's so much competition and so much turnover. Working on the client side is way more stable."

WELCOME BACK "BOOMERANGS"

After the Amazon article appeared in the *Times*, FCB Health CEO and president Dana Maiman was thrilled not to have received any feedback whatsoever. "To me it meant that people in our office don't see the same issues here," she says, adding with a laugh, "If I thought that article had even a smidge of relevance to our agency I'd totally stick my head in the oven."

Asked about FCB's work/life balance, Lisa Dujat, EVP and chief talent officer, says, "It sounds like a cliché to say we're in a people business, but that's our product—what we have is our people. So career development is a big focus, and we show employees that they're valued and that we care."

To show that employees value working at FCB, Maiman serves up a quick stat. "We hire many people straight from undergrad and intern programs, so it's not unusual that after a few years here they feel the need to explore," she explains. "But 30% of our staff are 'boomerangs'—people who leave only to come back home. One of them is a six-day returnee. We like to say he took a 'quick sabbatical.'"

As for the possible existence of stealth desk weepers at FCB, Maiman pooh-poohs the notion. "We have an open-door policy here. If people were crying, we'd know it."

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Dana Maiman,
FCB Health CEO and president

ALL ABOUT CONNECTING

Matt McNally, president of Publicis Health Media, says his 275-strong agency subscribes to a simple philosophy that serves it well. "We treat everyone as an adult," he shrugs. Which isn't to say that keeping everyone happy and relatively stress-free is a simple task, especially given that 80% of the company's employees are under 28 years old.

"We need to know what motivates millennials. They're very different from the previous generation—they like to work hard if they're also given opportunities to recharge," he says. "Millennials also love teamwork, being connected and sharing ideas." Whereas baby boomers want to be recognized as Employee of the Month, McNally notes that millennials like to celebrate one another's successes: "They're not cutthroat."

The agency's community commitment appeals to employees. As part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program Beyond School Walls, about 35 high schoolers visit PHM's Philadelphia office twice a month. "You can feel the energy when the kids are here," McNally says. He tells an anecdote about a recent visitor who said, "I wanna meet the boss"—and was immediately spirited away into McNally's office.

"He told me he wants to become an anesthesiologist," McNally says. "Imagine that—a 14-year-old with a passion for healthcare." ■