

Top-ranked bosses know how to “walk the talk”

From defending staff to child care help, top employers earn accolades, VIRGINIA GALT writes

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Finding quality child care for her daughter was not a problem when first-time mother Anuradha Ray was ready to return to her job as senior compliance analyst at **KPMG LLP** – the Toronto-based accounting firm had reserved a spot for baby Kavya in a nearby child care centre.

Better still, Ms. Ray's manager indulged her compulsion to peek at Kavya every now and then through the webcam mounted on her computer at work that was connected with the child care centre.

At Toronto-based **Cisco Systems Canada Co.**, chief executive officer Terry Walsh encourages employees to tell him if he has made a bad call. It is not a career-limiting move, he insists, to say: “Terry, you're an idiot.”

And when a surly customer treats his employees poorly, Chris Carder, CEO of Toronto-based technology company **ThinData Inc.**, doesn't let it pass. He makes sure to intervene and let it be known he won't allow his employees to be treated that way.

These are among several companies that have won various best-employer accolades from their own employees in recent weeks, both because of their policies and because of the way their bosses behave.

A company can have great policies on paper but, unless managers all the way to the top “walk the talk” and apply those policies

fairly and consistently, it will never make the grade as a great place to work, says Catharine Fennell, president of the Toronto-based career consulting firm **Market Yourself Smarter**.

“There is no greater compliment for any organization than to be voted onto the island by their own employees,” says Ms. Fennell, who presented some best-boss practices at a conference in Toronto this week.

Drawing on interviews from more than 400 employees about what differentiates a bad boss from a great boss, Ms. Fennell and Daphne Woolf, managing partner of **The Collin Baer Group**, reported this week that “gaining employees' trust and loyalty are two of the highest employee rewards any employer could expect to strive for.”

Employees want bosses who follow through on promises, who mean what they say, who act fairly and who support employees in their career development, says Ms. Woolf, whose firm advises clients on employee engagement issues.

ThinData was among 10 Canadian firms recognized as employers that “walk the talk” by Ms. Fennell and Ms. Woolf this week. Others included **Cisco Systems Canada Co.**, **Bell Canada**, a unit of Montreal-based **BCE Inc.**, and Toronto-based public relations firm **Media Profile**, all of which appeared on a panel discussing

their policies and boss practices this week.

At **Boston Consulting Group**, recently recognized as one of the Best 100 Employers to work for by New York-based **Working Mother** magazine, Toronto-based consultant Nan Dasgupta says many employers talk a good campaign; hers follows through.

The company sends in emergency nannies when its high-priced consultants are in a babysitting jam. These “improv nannies” drive the kids to and from school, stay late if necessary – and arrive with toys. Ms. Dasgupta says the emergency nanny service, paid for by her employer, was of enormous benefit recently when her regular nanny fell ill and she needed someone – fast – to care for her three young children.

The firm also allows returning mothers to reduce their work loads or work flexible hours without compromising their career prospects.

“The most critical thing about what makes this such a great environment is that I don't worry about what people are thinking, I'm not being judged, and for me, that makes the biggest difference,” Ms. Dasgupta says. “I don't feel bad about saying I'd like to take my kid to school. People don't think twice about it. A lot of the dads take their kids to school, too.”

At **KPMG**, which has retained its coveted spot as one of Canada's Top 100 Employers, as rated by Toronto-based **Mediacorp Canada Inc.**, Ms. Ray is easing back into full-time work. She has been working three days a week since returning from her maternity leave this past September.

Even before she officially returned from maternity leave, Ms. Ray was able to take a course and

enhance her skills because the firm subsidized an emergency spot for Kavya in a centre operated by Toronto-based Kids & Co., which now supplies full-time and back-up service on behalf of 300 corporate clients in Canada. Kids & Co. just opened its first overnight child-care centre in Toronto and also offers night and weekend service as well to working parents.

This is a huge benefit to people like Ms. Ray, especially since she and her husband, Sanjay, have no immediate family nearby to help them out in a pinch.

"We have our careers, we have invested a lot in our careers, but we also have our child... and we can actually have a balance, which is just wonderful for me," Ms. Ray says – and is the kind of thing that wins companies accolades from their employees.

A good boss is:

Accessible: A good boss is available to answer questions and provide direction. He or she is also receptive to ideas.

Supportive: A good boss not only serves as a mentor, but also promotes the best interests of employees. This boss does not block a promotion just because he or she doesn't want to lose a star performer.

In tune with employees: A good boss provides his or her employees with rewards that really matter on a personal basis, beyond cash bonuses. It could be as simple as saying thank you or giving a Friday afternoon off to get away to the cottage.

Responsive: A good boss sets aside some time, as soon as possible, for employees who request a conference – and keeps the appointment.

A bad boss is:

Elitist: Employees do not appreciate bosses who clearly value

some people more than others because of their job titles or the roles they perform.

Condescending: Employees want to be informed, and included, in decision making. They resent it when information is withheld because a manager thinks they don't need to know.

Inconsistent: Employees are quick to spot inconsistencies regarding what bosses say they are going to do and what they actually do. They also want equitable application of company policies and equal opportunity for promotion.

Dismissive: Employees want to be treated with respect and regarded as people, not "widgets." Employees who are on leaves of absence or maternity do not want to suffer "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" career setbacks.

How to build your own boss

Human resources consulting firm Development Dimensions International says that griping about the boss is a popular pastime with employees. So, "we're challenging them to see if they can do better," says Jocelyn Bérard, managing director of Toronto-based DDI Canada.

DDI has created an interactive on-line program that allows players to choose from a list of traits to create the boss they would love to work for – and play back the results. They can also select traits that characterize their current boss, and play back an animated version of the man or woman they have to report to every day on the job.

Click on <http://www.ddi-world.com/buildaboss> and follow the prompts.

Just be prepared to exit the site quickly if your real boss comes up behind you.

Source: Daphne Woolf, managing partner of The Collin Baer Group Ltd.