



NIXON PEABODY LLP
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

**To Make an Organization Great, First Make it a Great Place to
*Work***

By William Simpson, Director of Human Resources, Nixon Peabody, LLP



At Nixon Peabody LLP, one of our goals is to be a great place to work. Our employees tell us they do meaningful work in a culture of respect, camaraderie and teamwork. They feel informed, empowered and appreciated.

This positive culture is the result of a five-year journey that began when our Chairman, Harry Trueheart, challenged us to accomplish two goals: 1) Make Nixon Peabody the best firm to work *with*, and 2) Make Nixon Peabody the best firm to work *for*. Our management team embraced the challenge and implemented a plan to make it happen. As a result, Nixon Peabody was named to the Fortune 100 "Best Companies To Work For®" list this year.

How did we transform our firm? There's no silver bullet. We implemented a number of things, many of them seemingly small, which over time have dramatically changed our culture. I'd like to share some of the lessons we've learned because I believe they can help any organization of any size or industry become a great place to work.

Starting the journey to greatness

1. Use metrics to establish a benchmark

Begin by analyzing your culture to establish a benchmark, then measure progress regularly. We worked with an independent consultant to develop an employee satisfaction survey. The tool measures 35 indices including morale, team building, our performance appraisal process and employee recognition. The first time we used the survey, we established our benchmark and the results told us where we needed to improve.

We repeat the survey every 18 months, and we continue to use an independent consultant to analyze the results. The expertise and objectivity the consultants bring to the analysis are essential.

2. Determine what drives employee satisfaction in your company

Every organization is different and it's critical to determine what matters most to your employees. Our survey identified five drivers of job satisfaction for Nixon Peabody employees:

- a) Meaningful work: Our employees want to do challenging, rewarding work that matters.
- b) Recognition: We learned that a simple thank you is often more important than a bonus or gift. When employees go the extra mile to complete a task, an immediate pat on the back is a powerful reward. We're all human and we thrive on positive feedback. At Nixon Peabody, we've learned that a simple thank you, which costs nothing, can inspire employees like nothing else can.
- c) Respect for management: Our employees need to know that management can be trusted to make decisions fairly and wisely. They need a management team they can look up to and admire.

- d) Communications: Our employees want to be kept informed of what's going on in the firm.
- e) Empowerment: Nixon Peabody employees want the freedom to make decisions within their area of expertise. They want to know that honest mistakes won't invoke criticism or cost them their job. We have created a culture where mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn and improve.

3. Rethink your concept of diversity

Nixon Peabody approaches diversity differently than most organizations, and I believe that difference is one of our core strengths. Rather than restrict the definition of diversity to meeting the needs of minority groups, we expand it to a belief that diversity is an inclusionary concept. Every employee is a minority of one, if you will, with a unique set of skills, talents and life experiences, and we strive to recognize each person's unique perspective by creating an environment of inclusiveness. By acknowledging individual differences, we maximize individual strengths. Not only is this philosophy morally right, but it also makes good business sense.

Does this mean that we ignore the issues and concerns unique to African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, women and other minorities? Absolutely not. In fact, affinity groups meet regularly to discuss shared cultures, interests and issues. Their suggestions help us to continuously improve our culture and appreciation for our clients' needs as well. It's a perspective that makes a dramatic difference in our culture and our performance.

4. Commit to continuous improvement

When you decide to make your company a great place to work, understand that you're committing to an ongoing journey rather than a short-term project. Nixon Peabody has achieved phenomenal results over the last five years, but we still have areas that need

improvement. We're thrilled to have made the FORTUNE "100 Best Companies To Work For®" list but we're not satisfied to be 49 out of 100. We're striving to be number one.

4. Make employee satisfaction a strategic corporate goal

Making your company a great place to work starts at the top. Management must place as high a priority on employee satisfaction as it does on customer satisfaction, quality, financials and other strategic performance measures. At Nixon Peabody, every aspect of our business – recruitment, training programs, even bonus plans – is linked to employee satisfaction.

Reaping the benefits

Is it worth the effort? Without question! Every day I see the fruits of our efforts making Nixon Peabody a better law firm and a better corporate citizen in the communities we serve. Our employees consistently donate thousands of hours to pro bono work and community service. Employees in every Nixon Peabody office plan and implement fundraising events to benefit local charities, and they turn out in force each year for events such as the United Way Day of Caring.

Perhaps the best example of the value of our focus on our workplace, however, is an incident that occurred recently. A paralegal needed to care for her seriously ill mother in Florida. It was late in the year and the employee had used up most of her paid time off (PTO) vacation time. We offered our other employees the opportunity to donate their unused PTO to her. Within an hour, more than 40 days of PTO had been donated. The paralegal was able to care for her mother without having to worry about financial problems. To me, that show of support epitomizes the culture of teamwork and camaraderie we have developed at Nixon Peabody, and our employees as well as our clients are reaping the rewards.

Making your company a great place to work brings more tangible benefits as well. Over the last five years we've discovered that as our employee satisfaction levels have increased, so have our client satisfaction and financial results. It boils down to this: employees who enjoy what they do and feel challenged and appreciated, do better work. That translates into stronger client relationships and a stronger bottom line.

We believe this gives Nixon Peabody a tremendous advantage in recruiting, too. Being one of only six law firms on the Fortune 100 list gives us an unspoken advantage when recruiting for top talent. Our extremely low turnover rate also contributes positively to the bottom line.

Come share the knowledge

I've found that some of the greatest ideas for achieving workplace satisfaction come about through conversations with others. That's why Nixon Peabody is proud to sponsor the upcoming Diversity Conference and Legal Symposium on May 22-24, 2006 in Rochester, New York. I hope you'll join us in participating with leaders from across the country who recognize diversity as an important part of great business. As we've learned at Nixon Peabody, diversity is at the core of our strength and our success. To learn more about the conference, visit

http://www.workforcediversitynetwork.com/conf_main.aspx

About the Author

Bill Simpson has a vast human resources background spanning more than thirty five years. For the past twelve years, Bill has been director of human resources at Nixon Peabody LLP, one of the largest law firms in the United States. In 2006, Nixon Peabody was recognized by FORTUNE magazine as a "100 Best Companies to Work For®," one of only six law firms in the United States named to the list. Prior to joining Nixon Peabody, Bill spent 26 years with Eastman Kodak. Bill is a member of Nixon Peabody's Diversity Action Committee, which is headed by the firm's Chairman. He is also a founding member of the Workforce Diversity Network (formally the Greater Rochester Diversity Council). Bill lectures nationally, to organizations in both the human resources and legal sectors, on creating strategic plans for achieving human resources and diversity objectives. He has also published articles on various human resource subjects.