



American Structurepoint takes part in the Million Meal Marathon food drive at Lucas Oil Stadium.

# LISTEN AND LEARN

## Companies Process Feedback, Return to List

By Symone C. Skrzycki

“Be careful what you wish for,” warns an ominous adage. But the outcome can be much more positive when you are conveying your desires about workplace culture.

Those requests may just come true ... and benefit not only you, but your colleagues and employer.

Susan Weber, senior vice president of human resources and talent management at Elements Financial Federal Credit Union, has her “dream job.” Among its most rewarding aspects is working with staff to make the work environment even better.

Starting in 2010, Elements made the Best Places to Work list six straight years. An absence in 2016 inspired leadership and others “to devour” employee survey results and launch their own feedback sessions last fall.

“We took 30 employees in small groups of three each. It came down to three questions,” Weber recalls. “When I asked the question about, ‘What can we do to ensure you remain an active, engaged and productive employee?’ a couple of people in different sessions would lean up at the table and say, ‘Do more of this. Ask me what I think. Let me give you some feedback.’”

“The first time I heard somebody say this, I was like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ Really? I thought that was always an option.’”

In short, team members want their voices to be heard.

“We talk about that all the time,” Weber comments, “but the difference was that we created the forum for it to happen. We gave them a safe place, if you will, to have a conversation with us.”

Today, key words arising from that dialogue are displayed throughout Elements as a constant reminder.

“We’re continuing that in 2017,” Weber offers, her voice heavy with pride. “We’re doing these quarterly. It gives us a check point to know that we’re on the right track.”

Nurturing a culture that values all voices is a common theme among four companies – Elements, American Structurepoint, Jackson Systems and Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice of the Wabash Valley (VNA) – returning to the list in 2017 after an absence.

### Look who’s talking!

Kim Streeter, human resource and technology director, started at VNA 26 years ago. Located in Terre Haute, the non-profit has 100 employees; most work remotely as caregivers.

“The passion they (staff) feel in their work caring for others drives me to be passionate about what I do for them because they’re my customers,” she remarks.

VNA combs Best Places reports (provided to all applicants) to identify areas of opportunity.

“Communication always seems to score low. That’s probably (the case) in a lot of businesses, but with us being mostly mobile, that’s something we’re always working on: having brainstorming sessions with staff on better ways to communicate. Not only do we have to

communicate, but we have to watch out for HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) issues.”

Lower scores involving safety led VNA to establish an internal committee.

“It’s taken a look at the different safety issues not only in the office – that’s easy to control – but we have to pay attention in environments we have no control over, such as patient homes,” Streeter asserts.

Indianapolis-based Jackson Systems, a leading direct-to-contractor HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) controls manufacturer and distributor with approximately 50 employees, also takes Best Places findings seriously.

Tom Jackson, owner and CEO, emphasizes why empowering employees is vital.

“I own 50% of the company and my parents own 50%. We’re very technical people. We’re not HR-type people. We’re much more about, ‘How do we design something?’ he affirms. “Most of these things we’ve come up with to make it a great place to work have come from the employees.”

As Jackson begins to cite an example, he chuckles. “The first thing that comes to mind is that we give people their birthday off. That’s not an uncommon thing, but it was uncommon when it was brought to me. The other thing is we really have no dress code. You can wear shorts or jeans whenever you want. We give



Tom, Bette and Ron Jackson – owners of Jackson Systems – celebrate 20 years of service.

everybody lots of Jackson Systems shirts they can wear.”

### **Diversions and excursions**

Gestures of appreciation, grand and small, boost morale.

“Employee acknowledgement – that’s key around here,” stresses Melanie Wilson, senior human resources representative for American Structurepoint. The full-service engineering and architecture consulting firm

employs 400 nationally and about 300 people in Indianapolis.

“The feedback portion of the survey was definitely important, particularly last year when we didn’t make the list,” Wilson reflects. “A lot of the feedback was that we’re expecting a lot of hours out of people, but they didn’t really feel rewarded. We’ve tried to take that as a learning opportunity to do more team building: bringing in bagels for

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Blast from the past! Elements Financial whisks workers back to the 1980s.

## Listen and Learn

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people and any sort of thank you – no matter the monetary value. Giving the recognition piece.”

Additional examples include backyard barbecues, taking teams out to lunch and wellness offerings such as weekly fresh fruit delivery

Jackson Systems hosts an annual employee appreciation weekend. The getaway takes employees and a guest to a casino where they can dine, play and celebrate at an awards celebration.

“We have this thing throughout the course of the year where people can get poker chips for doing great things,” Jackson comments. “People nominate people, so they get all of these poker chips and they can trade them in for real money. We have a lot of fun. That’s always a great time and everybody looks forward to that.”

Human resources specialist Amanda Roeder adds, “It allows them to have visibility in front of the entire staff. At the end of the quarter, they can bid on prizes. We give away everything from a box of Andes mints to Xbox 360s.”

VNA also spotlights staff at a yearly celebration, often with comical or poignant awards.

“They’re not for the ‘best nurse’ or anything,” CEO Trudy Rupska confides. “This year, my award was, ‘Here’s a red pen. Let me correct that for you.’ They told a story that my second life is going to be as an editor someplace.”

“One time, we had a home health aide who was driving down the street and found a child wandering. She stayed with that child until the cops came. We gave her a ‘Lifesaver’ award.”

### Sense of togetherness

Community – both within and beyond the walls of American Structurepoint – is woven into its fabric.

“We do dollar for dollar matches,” Wilson explains. “If employees choose to do any payroll deductions, the company also matches those donations. We do a lot of community outreach.”

Promoting diversity plays into that mission.

“We have an advancing women’s group, formed within the past

three years or so,” Wilson notes. “It’s an internal group. They’ll do lunch and learns and invite all staff. In the engineering field, it’s very challenging. It’s a very male-dominated field, so the ones (women) we can get, we want to hold on to if they’re valuable staff members.”

Professional development also fosters an environment of collaboration. Elements, for instance, recently transformed a core department.

“In the past, the category of training (on Best Places surveys) was always one of our lowest scores. We’ve spent a lot of time and energy researching and engaging our employees in different programs throughout the year. It’s the reason we changed the name of our department,” Weber passionately relates. “We were just known as human resources and we made a very conscious decision to say, ‘This is human resources and talent management.’”

### One of us

Building a rapport begins prior to an employee’s first day of work at Jackson Systems.

“With the onboarding process, we do a lot of things to get our employees excited before they even start,” Roeder divulges. “We’ll send them an onboarding package. It’s usually related to their position. Our sales team (for instance) will break up their time on the phone by having Nerf gun wars, so we usually send new sales team members a Nerf gun and a gift card to their favorite restaurant.

“We try to connect with people in any way possible, which is why when they come in, they already feel pretty rooted with the leadership team.”

Roeder’s own first day wasn’t so long ago. She joined Jackson Systems last year.

“Immediately when I walked in and even throughout the interview process, I felt connected,” she reflects. “It was very genuine. A lot of times on the first day, you get nerves or think, ‘I hope this is everything I want it to be.’ And it definitely was.”



Staff at the Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice of the Wabash Valley put their best feet forward on National Nurses Day.

**RESOURCE:** American Structurepoint at [www.structurepoint.com](http://www.structurepoint.com) | Elements Financial Federal Credit Union at [www.elements.org](http://www.elements.org) | Jackson Systems at [www.jacksonsystems.com](http://www.jacksonsystems.com) | Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice of the Wabash Valley at [myhospicevna.org](http://myhospicevna.org)