

WORTH REPEATING

Quartet Sets Themselves Apart



By Rebecca Patrick and Matt Ottinger

What happens when culture isn't a short-term campaign but permeates an organization and how it gets things done? It breeds success and staying power. And in the case of the 2026 Best Places to Work in Indiana program, that translates into familiar faces atop four of the five employer categories.

Getting to that pinnacle takes big ideas and hard work. Returning there takes stamina: leaders who stay curious, act on feedback and keep raising expectations for how people are hired, supported, developed and celebrated.

Their consistent recognition is more than a ranking; it's a signal to Hoosier employers that the best workplaces aren't built once. They're rebuilt, reaffirmed and renewed – year after year.

No. 1 – Small | JA Benefits, LLC

The dynasty marches on for the Bedford-based benefits firm, with JA Benefits taking the title for the sixth time in eight years for small employers (between 15 and 34 employees).

For Chris Johnson, partner, chairman and CEO, the repeated honor “lets us know that it’s not just a fleeting event or a perk that we’ve added this year,” he imparts. The ultimate goal, Johnson notes, isn’t a label. “We’re focused on being the best place to work for each and every member of our team.”

Raising the bar

JA Benefits Partner and COO Clint Parker calls the culture there a “magnet,” emphasizing, “It’s the first thing that we mention in the hiring process, and we revisit it often with our team.”

Johnson stresses they “hire for fit first” and that skills can be developed. He adds, “You can’t teach character; you can’t teach curiosity.”

He puts it another way: “Culture at JA is not something that just happens around you in our world – it’s something that you’re a part of and participating in daily. So, it’s really important that if you enjoy the benefits of the type of people that you’re around, you also be that person for those around you as well.”

For JA, it’s now been “15-plus years of focused energy and effort towards building that magnetic culture,” Parker underscores.

And with that has come almost a “self-protecting” aspect to it where “team members are doing more and more of that work every year with us and alongside us,” he states.

The company also has kept things real. “We’ve never promised it to be easy, we’ve never promised it to be perfect, but we’ve given folks a framework to work through the challenges ... and be a really effective team when they have challenges that come up,” Parker affirms.

Support that hits home

Some of the most meaningful and sincere feedback, Parker says, comes when life’s challenges arise. “(For example), spending time with an individual that was in a very difficult situation, and she just looks at you and gives you a hug and says, ‘I don’t know what I’d do without my JA team. I’m glad that I found my people,’ he shares.

“Knowing that they’ve got that type of community around them – and we’ve helped be a small part of creating that through the ways we’ve intentionally built culture – is really special.”

Johnson points to an 18-year employee who tied performance to

flexibility at home. They could give more to clients because “they didn’t have to give up time with their family” and “weren’t expected to miss moments in their kids’ lives.”

Perhaps the most telling statement of why people stay at JA Benefits came when an employee told Parker: “Don’t they know I work at JA, which makes me unhireable? ... I’m never leaving. I don’t care what they offer.”

Beyond the office

That people-first mindset that keeps employees at JA shows up as strong in community support. Parker describes their Christmas effort: “Our office will be absolutely packed with food, clothes, toys. ... The number of families reached each year continues to grow and just blows me away when you think about how many families have a Christmas morning because our team took it upon themselves to create it.”

Johnson says the recipient list comes from everyday connections: “It comes up in places like church, school or sometimes even parent-teacher conferences or after school activities – anywhere someone might notice a child who doesn’t have the shoes or winter coat they need or might be able to use some help creating a special Christmas morning. At this point, it’s really coming from all directions.”

It all circles back to hiring for values and fit – and building a place where people can lean on each other through real life.



Six weeks into their role, new hires are asked about the company, “Are we who we say we are?” COO Clint Parker reports their “cool” response: “Yeah, it’s actually better than I thought it would be.”

No. 1 – Medium | E-gineering

It's been 15 years since E-gineering was first named the best of the best and has been a mainstay near the top ever since. For co-founder and chief revenue officer Nick Taylor, the annual Best Places to Work survey is less about taking a victory lap and more about staying accountable.

"Whenever we get the survey back and we see (even a few) folks that are saying, 'Well, they don't do this well,' or 'I wish they did that,' then we're going to lean in around how we can change that," he offers. "It very much holds us accountable ... because we want to address the things where we're weakest at and improve."

Humming along

E-gineering is just under a hundred people and growing. After more than two decades of steady progress, Taylor is seeing acceleration: "We worked so hard to get where we're at after 25 years and now the 26th year is like this accelerated growth ... we're scaling." When E-gineering took top honors in 2011 in the small category, they had 26 employees.

The Indianapolis firm wants to be proactive in keeping things humming. One example is E-gineering's advocacy program, designed to maintain a close-knit feel as the business grows.

"Everyone in our company has an advocate that takes them out for coffee and just makes sure that we have a pulse on them," Taylor explains. The conversations go beyond project updates: "Not just professionally, but ... spiritually, emotionally – how's your family doing?"

Grounded in trust

Taylor, who works in business development, says culture is the company's calling card. "People ask, 'What do you do?' And I spend very little time on what we do. I spend a lot of time in how we do it," he says, pointing to E-gineering's focus on relationships, service and trust.

Those priorities show up in the company's stated values – people, excellence and integrity – and in a long-term approach to fostering talent. Taylor describes E-gineering as "a home that's a safe place ... they can build their career," adding that when life happens, "we're a company that's going to have their back, take stuff off their plate ... and tell them come back when you're healthy."

That commitment became even more concrete when the firm became employee-owned through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan



E-gineering's service mindset extends beyond clients to volunteer efforts – and not just financially, but with their talents. Habitat for Humanity and Samaritan's Purse are two organizations that benefit.

(ESOP) five years ago. Underlying it all is a simple standard Taylor calls the company's hidden motto: "Do what's right, risk the consequences." He adds, "Act like an owner. ... If you act like an owner and you hire folks that act like that, a lot of good stuff is going to happen because you don't have to micromanage."

Prioritizing relationships

As a tech company, E-gineering is balancing flexibility with connection. "We have very much a hybrid (work) approach," Taylor notes, but the goal is to keep relationships strong. "We feel like it's on us to have a vibrant culture so that it's attractive enough where people want to come in the office."

A new office lease is on the horizon, and Taylor maintains the company plans to "step it up," while continuing monthly luncheons and lunch-and-learns for the team.

On the client side, E-gineering remains rooted in custom software development, but has expanded as demand shifts to good data for AI.

Even with new tools and a fast-changing market, Taylor says the differentiator isn't hype – it's execution and trust. "Our strength is we're doers," he emphasizes. "We roll up our sleeves, and we're engineers at the end of the day. ... (But) we have to consult and first, we have to build this trusted advisorship and then get the work done."

No. 1 – Large | McGohan Brabender

Make it two years in a row for benefits broker McGohan Brabender headlining the large company list with 250-999 employees. The firm is headquartered in Dayton with a location in Indianapolis.

"Earning the No. 1 ranking (last year) meant everything to us," recalls Brian Doll, senior account manager. "It validated our culture and showed that when we put people first, work together, support each other, show up with purpose, great things and great results follow."

He adds, "That recognition really strengthened our sense of unity. It reminded us that our culture is our greatest competitive advantage, so it was fantastic."

Always improving

The Best Places to Work survey process, administered by Workforce Research Group, remains a point of emphasis for McGohan Brabender and prompted the business, which has six locations in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio, to get even better in the past year.

"The survey process reminded us how much our people value

communication, flexibility and feeling supported," Doll relays. "Based on that feedback, we've added more well-being resources, more resources towards development and flexibility options in the past year."

Doll points to the addition of TextCare, which is available to McGohan Brabender's employees and their family members.

"It's a 24/7 virtual care service that lets people connect with one-to-one health – that's the provider with a full-time medical team, by text, by phone or by video," he offers. "So it's really, really convenient. It's nice to have a doctor in your pocket, so to speak, to be able to reach out to any time of the day for us and for our family members."

Big investments

One mantra that's evident at McGohan Brabender is the company "invests in the whole person."

Doll explains: "We mean we support our people beyond just their jobs. So supporting them for their growth, for their well-being, for their work-life balance and really just the overall sense of belonging.

We focus on developing people professionally, supporting them personally and creating an environment where they feel valued and connected, and they can thrive as their full selves.”

Speaking of investing, the company adopted an ESOP in 2021. The move has been a catalyst in building even further buy-in among its staff and “fostering accountability,” according to Doll.

“Becoming an ESOP really can transform a company’s culture – the finances, the succession planning and really long-term performance,” he imparts. “So I kind of look at it as a way to secure legacy. Employees who are owners tend to be more motivated, invested and satisfied; it improves job retention and loyalty, and is especially valuable in a competitive talent market.”

In the business

One potential advantage in being a benefits company, according to Doll, is that it “shapes our culture because we live the same values that we deliver.”

He concludes, “We understand firsthand what meaningful support looks like. We build a culture centered on well-being, empathy and trust – and by practicing what we provide to our clients, we create an



Engagement with the community is a focus at McGohan Brabender. With support of his colleagues, family and friends, staffer Brian Doll rappelled down a 23-story building to raise money for the United Way’s basic needs initiative.

environment where our people feel cared for, valued and empowered to do their best work.”

No. 1 – Major | CAPTRUST

Welcome back, CAPTRUST! The financial advisory firm returns to a top spot – only this time, the company is in the major category for those with 1,000 or more employees nationally. It last achieved the No. 1 ranking among large employers in 2022.

Shortly before that victory and initial entry into the contest, CAPTRUST had recently acquired Lakeside Wealth Management in Chesterton. Now, CAPTRUST’s Chesterton team has a sister office in Indianapolis, and its Hoosier employees are forging an ongoing bond.

“They’ve become really good friends, and I think they made the choice to join CAPTRUST for the same reason we did, which was that the culture was extremely consistent with what our vision already had been when we created our respective separate companies,” relays Mark Chamberlain, principal. “The most important part of our choice was that the people were our priority.”

He credits CAPTRUST for sticking to its word in not trying to change the firm following its acquisition – allowing for consistency and its staff-friendly environment to continue to thrive.

“Actually, before we came on board with them, we talked to some of the other offices that they’d just acquired and we got a very



There’s no (half) dogging it at CAPTRUST, where the team emphasizes culture, unity and hard work.

consistent message from them, so we knew we were in the right place,” Chamberlain notes.

Finding meaning

When asked what CAPTRUST’s employees likely enjoy the most, Chamberlain points to a broader concept of “context over content.”

“It’s never been easier to get information, whatever kind of information you’re looking for – but what’s really hard is to have one of your colleagues sift through the data and understand that what they do matters, and it gives them meaning . . . if you can show them what their handprint on the final product looks like, that means a lot to them.”

Ultimately, it’s about “creating the workplace as a place that people want to be versus a place that they have to go to,” Chamberlain suggests.

‘Clients can tell’

Chamberlain shares that staff members truly enjoy being in the office together but contends a culture can become stagnant if not properly considered.

“I really believe the culture isn’t a thing that you can achieve; I think it’s a thing that you have to continue to chase and follow,” he asserts. “It’s dynamic, and I don’t think you can get to a level where you say, ‘Hey, we have the culture and we’re good to go.’”

“I think you constantly have to – through a process of rigorous self-examination – understand times have changed, so maybe our culture needs to change a little bit and maybe this is a little bit off over here. Let’s ask some questions.”

He adds that receiving anonymous feedback through the Best Places to Work survey can inspire nervousness, yet it’s well worth it to know what employees think and how the organization can be improved.

And ultimately, it’s better for business.

“Clients can tell,” he states. “If they’re talking to your people and they’re miserable and they freaking hate coming to work, they can tell. But if they’re happy – and people want to be around happy people – you can tell from clients.”

RESOURCES: Chris Johnson and Clint Parker, JA Benefits, at www.jabenefits.com | Nick Taylor, E-gineering, at www.e-gineering.com | Brian Doll, McGohan Brabender, at www.mcgohanbrabender.com | Mark Chamberlain, CAPTRUST, at www.captrust.com