

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAKING **WORKPLACES** WORK
Employer Best Practices
in Kentucky₂₀₀₇



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

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Making Workplaces Work: Employer Best Practices in Kentucky 2007

Kentucky's labor force is changing. The average worker today is older, and many serve as caregiver to both children and parents. Kentucky's economy is changing as well. The shift from manufacturing to service-sector employment has resulted in an increasing number of employees working nontraditional hours and more than one job. These multiple commitments to both work and home create distinctive challenges not only for workers but for their employers.

Responding to the needs of employees while also remaining focused on organizational needs can be difficult for any employer, especially for those with small- and medium-sized businesses. How do employers in today's market maintain or increase productivity while providing the flexibility workers need to balance their commitments? *Making Workplaces Work: Employer Best Practices in Kentucky* profiles 24 Kentucky businesses of all sizes that have modified their day-to-day operations to meet the needs of the contemporary workforce, with impressive results. The report was produced by a new interdisciplinary research unit of the University of Kentucky, the Institute for Workplace Innovation (iWin), under the direction of Jennifer E. Swanberg, Ph.D., executive director and associate professor in the UK College of Social Work.

The employers profiled in the report represent a growing number of companies that recognize investing in their own employees is a good business decision. Together these companies employ more than 58,000 Kentuckians. *Making Workplaces Work* highlights seven areas of innovation that are applicable to employees at different stages of their careers and have proven effective in attracting, motivating and retaining a loyal workforce.

- Health and Wellness
- Dependent Care
- Financial Assistance
- Employee Development
- Flexible Workplace Options
- Community Investment
- Effective Workplace Culture

Mounting health care costs are a concern to employers. Studies demonstrate that businesses can decrease employee health-related costs by implementing health and wellness options, and several area employers have incorporated such programs in the workplace. Woodward, Hobson and Fulton LLP created an in-house fitness program to help employees maintain healthy lifestyles. Fayette Heating & Air Conditioning contracts with an outside company to provide a wide array of supportive services, including mental health counseling and referrals and support services for dealing with the death or illness of loved ones. Central Baptist's Healing Community program is designed to help employees deal with stress in their lives.

In more than 60 percent of Kentucky households that include children, all of the adults are employed outside of the home. The Dependent Care segment of *Making Workplaces Work* details how companies are addressing this issue, such as Toyota’s on-site, 24-hour daycare center and the University of Kentucky’s Elder Care program, which has assisted more than 4,000 employees since 1990. Bluegrass Auto Body allows its employees flexibility in work scheduling so they can attend their children’s after-school and sports activities. Meridian Communications has adopted a unique approach in allowing children in the workplace during normal business hours.

The positive impact that financial assistance programs can have on employees is a wise investment. Norton Healthcare provides first-time home buyers with forgivable loans to be used toward down payments and closing costs. Gray Construction’s employees are provided with financial assistance for adoptions. Highlighted in this section’s “Innovation at a Glance” are Fayette Health & Air Conditioning’s program that allows employees to drive company trucks to and from work, and Baptist Hospital’s “Knowledge Program,” which provides forgivable loans for students enrolled in health professions programs.

Economic globalization is another factor influencing today’s workplace. There is a growing demand for a skilled workforce, yet employees may not be prepared with skills needed to perform in a highly technical and rapidly changing economy. *Making Workplaces Work* profiles six companies that have implemented innovative strategies in employee personal and professional development: A.G. Edwards, Baptist Hospital, Stock Yards Bank & Trust Company, Dean, Dorton & Ford, Compressed Air Parts and Services, and Crowe Chizek and Company LLC.

Flexible work options vary across industry and job type. Kentucky Orthopedic Rehab Team provides six different types of flexible work solutions, from telecommuting to a condensed work week. Central Baptist Hospital provides career flexibility for its older workers. During the summer months, Thompson Associates implements a compressed work week to accommodate busy summer schedules. Ten-hour, four-day work weeks have become the norm at W. Rogers Company. Kentuckians For The Commonwealth provides several paid-leave options to allow for employees’ personal and professional growth. Also highlighted is Fifth Third Bank’s “Vacation Purchase” program, which allows employees to customize time-off options.

Community investment has become an important part of strategic planning for many companies. Younger workers, in particular, are drawn to organizations that support employee community service. Each employer highlighted in the Community Investment segment of *Making Workplaces Work* has implemented an innovative program that supports their employees’ desire to give back to their communities. Appriss Inc. encourages employees to volunteer with the victim-services community on company time. United Parcel Service formed a unique partnership with the Commonwealth of Kentucky and Louisville City Government to create the “Metropolitan College,” providing full benefits to part-time workers who are enrolled in area colleges or universities. Profiled in “Innovation at a Glance” is Norton Healthcare’s partnership with the Annie E. Case Foundation’s Making Connections initiative, connecting families to jobs, resources and services.

The quality of employees’ jobs and the culture in which they work have become critical to recruiting and retaining key talent. Organizations that have adapted their workplace cultures to include employee engagement and work-life effectiveness have become “employers of choice” and are considered among the best places to work in their communities. The businesses profiled in the final section of *Making Workplaces Work* were chosen because they are part of a growing number of global businesses that are redefining their organizational cultures to be responsive to both the needs of the changing workforce and the demands of the new economy. They include Meridian Communications, W. Rogers Company, Fifth Third Bank’s Central Kentucky Affiliate, Central Bank, and Akebono Brake, Elizabethtown Plant. All recognize that employee engagement is important for employee retention and have created environments that are responsive to employee needs.

Copies of *Making Workplaces Work: Employer Best Practices in Kentucky* are available at no charge by contacting the UK Institute for Workplace Innovation at (859) 296-1089 or iwin@iwin.uky.edu. An electronic copy also is available on the institute’s Web site at <http://iwin.uky.edu>