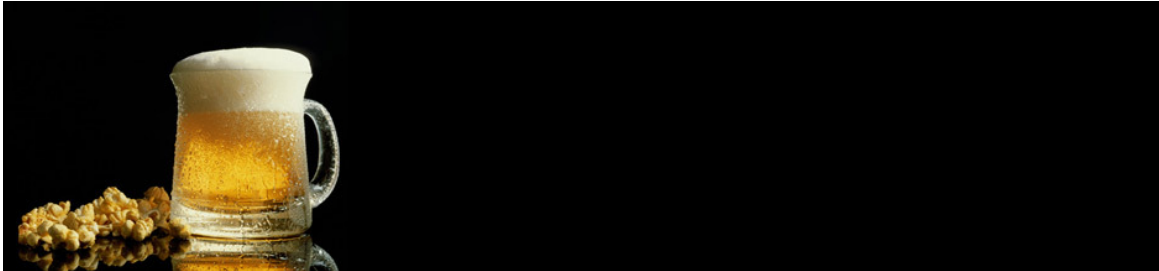


'Kidnap Day,' beer, massages among job perks

By: Rachel Zupek

Where can you grab a cold beer from the company keg when the clock strikes four? Where can you take in a yoga class during your lunch hour? And where can you do laundry for free?



At work, that's where.

Years ago, such generous benefits were better fit for a utopian dream than real workplaces.

Nowadays, while competitive salaries and advancement opportunities still rank high on the list of job priorities, lavish perks like posh vacations, gourmet cafeterias and concierge services are inching their way up the importance scale.

Employers want perks that offer a way to make life easier for their employees, says Rosemary Haefner, vice president of human resources for CareerBuilder.com.

By taking care of chores employees either dislike or don't have time for, employers create a stronger emotional tie between the employee and the company, as well as increase productivity and retention.

"Employers realize the best way to retain prized employees among the current talent crunch is to make them want to stay, often through first-rate perks," Haefner says. "In addition to the standard comprehensive benefits package, some companies are taking things a step further, offering unique perks to keep current employees happy and new employees eager to stick around."

The company perks we came across ran the gamut from widespread to unique to downright unfair.

Check out how companies, big and small, across the country are keeping their employees happy.

1. Barkley; Kansas City, Missouri

Great perks: This advertising agency has an annual "Kidnap Day," when the company shuts down for the day and workers are taken to an undisclosed location, like an arcade.

Additionally, there are break-time activities, like pool and ping-pong tournaments, and free Boulevard beer on tap after 4 p.m. To top it off, employees are given birthdays off (with \$25 spending money); on-site yoga; and a rooftop observation deck with gardens, Wi-Fi access and barbecue grills.

2. SAS; Cary, North Carolina

Great perks: Along with amenities like an on-site hair salon, massage therapy and car detailing, this software company also features subsidized day care centers and a free on-site healthcare center, complete with doctors, nurse practitioners and nutritionists.

3. Homestead Technologies; Menlo Park, California

Great perks: Talk about time off: Employees earn paid winter breaks from Christmas to New Year's Day; paid days off for birthdays; unlimited paid sick leave; and after five years with the company, a four-week sabbatical earning two-thirds of their salary.

They also receive \$100 gift cards for their birthdays, an all-expenses-paid retreat each year and use of a cabin in Lake Tahoe during the ski season (for a small fee to rent).

4. VistaPrint; Lexington, Massachusetts

Great perks: Employees who have been with this graphic design and custom-printing company for five years have the chance to take a one month, paid sabbatical -- to do whatever they please.

5. Creative Business Resources (CBR); Phoenix, Arizona

Great perks: In addition to regular holiday bonuses in 2006, employees at CBR, a human resource outsourcing company, got a surprise bonus: a \$150 shopping spree after the holiday team lunch.

Employees received cash and were told to return with receipts showing how they spent the money on themselves.

6. Goldman Sachs; New York, New York

Great perks: Employees who get married or register a domestic partnership get an extra week of vacation at this global investment banking, securities and investment management firm.

7. Google Inc.; Mountain View, California

Great perks: To name a few: Employees receive up to \$8,000 per year in tuition reimbursement; unlimited sick leave; 27 days of paid time off after one year; on-site conveniences like medical and dental facilities, oil changes, car washes, haircuts, free washers and dryers, and three (free) gourmet meals a day.

No wonder this search engine firm was voted No.1 in Fortune's 2007 "100 Best Companies to Work For."

8. National Court Appointed Special Advocates Association; Seattle, Washington

Great perks: Workers enjoy a "bring your baby to work" policy, which allows employees to bring their newborns to work until they're 6 months old or for a total of three months.

9. Digitas Health; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Great perks: Free gym memberships (including lunchtime yoga); "Beer Fridays" during the colder months to kick off the weekends; and summer hours on Fridays to get out and enjoy the weather.

10. San Francisco SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)

Great perks: If dogs are well-behaved, employees can bring them to work; they're also allowed one day off when an animal companion dies.

11. KPMG; New York, New York

Great perks: Workers for this audit, tax and advisory firm earned a five-day weekend around the Fourth of July this year, with a "Barbecue Bonanza" gift of steaks, chicken, hot dogs and hamburgers.

The firm also runs seasonal contests, like "Movie Madness" (around the Academy Awards) or the "Summer Vacation Photo Challenge." Prizes include big-screen TVs, iPods, Nintendos and travel vouchers.

12. Adams & Knight; Avon, Connecticut

Great perks: Perks are in the environment at this advertising agency.

The center of the building is a full-scale replica of a 1950s diner, complete with booths, a jukebox and a Coca-Cola machine (which spits out free bottles of Coke and Diet Coke). Halls are lined with original, restored ads from the '40s and '50s, and there's a 60-seat theater used as a meeting space for clients and staff.