FOCUS ON CAREERS
annual top employers survey

High marks for innovation, long-term vision, and social responsibility

The Science Careers Top Employers Survey celebrates 15 years with more respondents from the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry than ever. Some things haven’t changed, though. Employees prioritize innovation, a positive work culture, and social responsibility. Executives emphasize a long-term commitment to developing products that employees can be proud of. Other features in the 2017 survey include a widespread support for science education, a low percentage of respondents seeking a job, and the dominance of a pharmaceutical company recognized for volunteerism. By Chris Tachibana

From small beginnings come great things, according to an old saying. The first Top Employers Survey, in 2002, had 685 respondents. This year, almost 7,000 answered the web-based questionnaire; 94% were employed in a biotech, biopharmaceutical, or pharmaceutical company. Most (83%) were over 30 years old and had a Master’s or Doctorate degree (64%).

The survey’s reach is growing. In 2002, about 82% of respondents were from North America and the rest from Western Europe. The 2017 distribution included 65% from North America, 25% from Europe, and 7% from the Asia/Pacific Rim. As in previous surveys, respondents named companies they considered the best employers and rated them in categories such as leadership and direction, work culture/environment, and intellectual challenge.

A consistent winner: Innovation

The 2017 top company is 30-year-old Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, headquartered north of New York City, with six medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Regeneron was the No. 1 workplace for the fifth time in six years after first appearing at No. 2 in 2011. Being an innovative leader in the industry has consistently driven selection as the best employer. George Yancopoulos, president and chief scientific officer, believes this is why only Regeneron and Genentech have led the survey more than once. “Few other companies can demonstrate that their innovation comes from their own labs,” he says. “Our success stories are homegrown.”

Of the 23 novel drugs approved by the FDA through June 2017, Yancopoulos notes that Regeneron invented two, which were developed and commercialized with Sanofi. Many employees are connected to each new medicine. “They either had the initial idea or contributed to a key step along the way,” Yancopoulos says. “They may have been part of a new approach or technology that made a difference in development.”

Namita Gandhi, director of clinical sciences, joined Regeneron in 2007, when the drug that became the immune modulator dupilumab was in early development. Gandhi says her career at Regeneron tracked dupilumab’s trajectory. As it moved from translation to clinical development, her work did too. After making a case that dupilumab might work against nasal polyps, she is now overseeing research on it for this and other indications. “That shows that science drives our business,” she says.

Gandhi says Regeneron’s emphasis on science was obvious from the moment she started there. “I learned to analyze data even more critically than when I was in graduate school,” she says. “Even when I was a junior scientist, I sat at the table with senior leadership and talked about my data, and they listened.”

Senior Vice President of Human Resources Sally Paull notes that Regeneron’s leaders are scientists who get more excited about research results than financial reports. “They’re committed to science, take the long view, and don’t compromise. It’s the corporate version of strength of character.” Yancopoulos confirms this long-term strategy. “We don’t judge ourselves by the market,” he says. “We judge ourselves cont.>

Upcoming advertising features
by how we are setting up to make a difference in peoples’ lives. We look 10 to 20 years in the future. That’s what keeps us enthusiastic and attracts the best employees.”

Regeneron stays committed to its approach of using genetics to find drug opportunities and fill the pipeline, Yancopoulos says. In 2014, the company officially launched the Regeneron Genetics Center, which forms diverse private–public collaborations to gain disease insights and find targets by pairing human DNA sequences with electronic health records.

**Culture and values**

Top employers have a work culture that encourages employee loyalty and aligns corporate with personal values. Novozymes, based in Denmark but with 6,500 employees worldwide, scored well in these categories. After debuting in the survey in 2015, it has consistently been in the top 10, this year at No. 3, also takes social impact seriously. For Chief Scientific Officer David Altshuler, Vertex’s recognition for innovation and social responsibility are linked. With two-thirds of its 2,000 employees working in R&D, con.
the company is committed to applying its resources to game-changing treatments for serious diseases. “We only work on what we believe will be transformative medicines for life-threatening illnesses,” he says. “That means treating underlying causes, not just symptoms, and taking risks.” When conventional wisdom said only gene therapy could correct the root cause of cystic fibrosis, Vertex developed pill-based treatments that address the underlying disease mechanism, says Altshuler. This kind of success reinforces to employees that their work is pioneering and having an impact on society.

To concretely connect employees’ work to the community, CEO Jeff Leiden says that Vertex maintains connections to patients helped by their medications. “Every launch celebration, we have a patient who is taking the medication come talk to us,” he says. “It’s inspiring—there isn’t a dry eye in the house.” Leiden says Vertex’s success is grounded in Boston’s innovative science “ecosystem.” “It’s our responsibility to support it so the next generation can thrive,” he says. He especially backs people who are underrepresented in science. Vertex university scholarships, for example, include ongoing help for first-generation college students and others who might need extra mentoring. Vertex has a summer internship program for underprivileged high school students that is amplified by Leiden’s work on the Massachusetts governor’s science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) advisory council. He is recruiting and assisting other companies in applying the Vertex internship model. “We’re extending what we’ve learned from our initiatives across the state,” he says, “so everyone can benefit from what started in Boston.”

**Long-term vision**

“Vision” is a broad term, but leaders of companies that scored well on corporate vision easily defined it: a long-term commitment to science, communicated strongly and regularly from leadership, backed by action such as allocation of resources and recognition of successes.

Vision and employee loyalty are strengths of fourth-position Merck KGaA (legally independent from U.S.-based Merck & Co.), headquartered in Darmstadt, Germany. It has 50,000 employees worldwide in three sectors: health care, life science, and performance materials. The company’s core is a balance of stability and flexibility that developed over generations, says Executive Board Member and CEO for Performance Materials Kai Beckmann.

“We have our 350-year anniversary next year,” says Beckmann, “with the same family owners, so we have a clear sense of purpose and long-term thinking about advancing science. We have a degree of predictability in how we treat our employees.” At the same time, Merck KGaA offers flexibility, for example, in work hours and location. It emphasizes diversity and the voicing of different perspectives. Beckmann says the company encourages employees to be curious and “tackle new things every day.” Respect for employees shows, for instance, in the company’s long history of supporting health care and child care. These benefits were new concepts when introduced at Merck KGaA decades ago.

Today, Beckmann says, the company perceives itself as a vibrant science and technology leader and is increasing in visibility, especially to the scientific community. Before, he says, “the company was a place you fell in love with on second sight. It was not highly visible from the outside, but once you were here and knew what the company did, you became very loyal.”

One way the company will mark its 350th year in business and clarify its mission of progress for people everywhere is “Curious2018—Future InSight,” a special international conference for those in science, business, entrepreneurship, and technology, intended to inspire game-changing applications and breakthroughs. Immediately following Curious2018 will be a special edition of the company’s long-running Innovation Cup, a one-week course and contest in which STEM Ph.D.s and MBAs work with Merck KGaA employees to develop novel ideas into business plans for a chance to win a €20,000 (US$24,000) first prize.

Another firm prioritizing external visibility is the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca and its global biologics R&D arm, MedImmune. The company returns to the top 20 at No. 11 after an absence since 2011. Mene Pangalos, executive vice president of AstraZeneca’s Innovative Medicines and Early Development (IMED) Biotech Unit, believes the achievement reflects changes in company culture in recent years. “We’re more transparent, collaborative, and visible,” he says. Peer-reviewed publications, academic and industry partnerships, and sharing of data, molecules, and access to preclinical assays are all encouraged. Highlighting the company’s research through publications and conference presentations helps recruit top scientists, Pangalos says.

To convey the company’s commitment to scientific progress, IMED holds retreats for scientists across its four global biohubs in Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, and China, to present their latest work and hear speakers. Scientific successes are rewarded, Pangalos says, with events like MED’s annual black-tie awards ceremony, for example. “It’s energizing, fun, and a celebration of great science,” he says. “It’s like a science Oscars.”

MedImmune, acquired by AstraZeneca in 2007, is led by Bahija Jallal. “My job,” she says, “is providing an environment where people are encouraged to dream big, come up with new ideas, and take smart risks.” For example, Jallal says, the MedImmune physical space is open, with places for talking and collaborating. As a scientist herself, Jallal encourages employees to always ask why, saying, “We minimize predefined ways of doing things. We invite people to bring ideas and challenge what we do.”

As an executive vice president of AstraZeneca, Jallal must also ensure consistency across global sites. The company allows for local cultural differences, she says, and realizes everyone will succeed in their own way, but also works to be sure everyone is moving in the same direction. “It’s important for us to have one vision as a company,” she explains, “allowing a little bit of freedom but with guiding principles.” Jallal works to give researchers the big picture and emphasizes their involvement in research, developing, and manufacturing a drug. “To employees,” Jallal says, “MedImmune has the best of both worlds: an entrepreneurial, nimble culture that allows us to do great science and move fast, with the footprint, maturity, and resources of a big company.”

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**Demographics**

**Gender:**
52% Male, 43% Female, 5% No response

**Experience:**
69% have 10 or more years work experience

**Highest degree earned:**
34% Doctorate, 30% Master’s, 29% Bachelor’s, 7% Other

**Company type:**
35% Pharma, 23% Biotech, 36% Biopharma, 1% University, 5% Other; More than 9 out of 10 work in private industry

**Nature of work:**
28% Development, 19% Applied Research, 14% Basic Research, 8% Administration/Executive, 11% QA/QC/Regulatory Affairs, 7% Production, 13% Other (respondents were able to choose more than one response)

**Geography:**
65% from North America, 25% from Europe, 7% from Asia/Pacific, 3% from rest of world

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Once companies have a clear vision, how is it conveyed across diverse sites and divisions? At Merck & Co. (at No. 17), Celeste Warren says, “I consider it a best corporate practice to communicate to all employees in a timely fashion what is happening in the company.” Warren is vice president, Human Resources and Global Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence at the global health care company that is based in Kenilworth, New Jersey, and known as MSD outside the United States and Canada. Warren says that quarterly employee business briefings from the CEO and CFO are critical. In addition, she says, “Our ongoing leader and manager training stresses communicating our vision and explaining what it means to people in your division, department, or group.”

Rich Tillyer, Merck & Co. senior vice president, Global Chemistry, says that even with about 69,000 employees, everyone supports the goal of having a positive impact on health. People apply it in their daily work by following the example that comes from the top. “Our CEO and the leadership team work at aligning the vision with company decisions and it pays off,” Tillyer says. “People see that our investments and decisions line up with our vision as an organization.”

For example, he says, “We spend a good deal of time discussing how to push more deliberately and urgently toward the outcomes we’re looking for and how we can contribute. It’s a concerted effort to go in the right direction and take suggestions from employees both on what we do and how we do it.” Positive reinforcement is a must in drug discovery, Tillyer says, because the process requires extraordinary persistence. He points to recent company successes with an Ebola vaccine and a biomarker-targeting cancer treatment. “When we announce and celebrate bringing products to patients,” Tillyer says, “we acknowledge all the people involved. We give credit to all the programs across the organization.”

At Merck & Co. R&D, Jennifer O’Neil, principal scientist in Biology-Oncology Discovery, translates that corporate vision into employees’ workdays. “When I meet with my direct reports,” she says, “we talk about what key questions their experiments will answer and how that will drive us forward to new medicines. If the science is interesting but not getting medicines to patients, it’s a lower priority.” The quarterly business reports are meaningful for employees, including in research, O’Neil says. “Everybody who works here would like to say they contributed to something that was featured across the company and is having an impact on patients with a particular disease.”

Support for STEM education

Social responsibility consistently appears on the list of top employer features. The reason? “Employees want to know their company stands for something,” Warren says. Beckmann notes the importance of this factor to recruitment. “Acting responsibly resonates with the younger generation of employees,” he says. “They want to know: Beyond how we treat our own teams, what is our contribution to our communities?”

This year, Regeneron was included in the Civic 50, a list of community-minded U.S. companies assembled by the Points of Light organization, which is dedicated to mobilizing volunteers. An example is a skills-based pilot program that Gandhi participates in. Employee volunteer at community organizations on a short-term project that uses their specialized skills, such as finance or in Gandhi’s case, data analysis. She is working with a nonprofit that provides resources to families who are struggling socially or economically and have children with a life-threatening illness. Gandhi is helping the organization analyze data showing its impact on families.

The top companies in the 2017 survey proudly support STEM education as their contribution to the communities where their employees live and work. Regeneron has pledged more than $100 million to the long-running U.S. competition that is now called the Regeneron Science Talent Search. “It’s near and dear to our hearts,” Yancopoulos says. Both he and CEO Leonard Schleifer were participants in high school. “I like to point out that Len was a semifinalist and I was a winner,” he laughs. “But that is our major cause. There’s nothing more important than engaging the brightest young minds in science to cure disease, work on climate change, and find new energy sources.”

Novozymes supports science education as an investment in the future of the industry. “In the Western world,” Nielsen says, “we’re going to have a deficit of people educated in natural science, even in the next 10 years. The remedy is not quick. That’s why we are investing in educating young teachers and kids in biology.”

The Novozymes Educate initiative, adopted in 2015, pledges to reach 1 million learners by 2020, enhancing their understanding of biology, biotechnology, and sustainability. At sites in India, China, the United States, and Brazil, Novozymes employees work with local educators to determine the best programs for their community, says Arlan Peters, head of sustainability, Novozymes North America.

For example, in North Carolina, where Peters is based, Novozymes partners with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Morehead Planetarium and Science Center to hold science nights at elementary schools. The events offer families entertaining, informative, hands-on activities about topics including enzymes, evolution, and electronics. Novozymes also holds a biotech contest for Franklin County Early College High School, with equipment and mentoring for experiments to perform at school, culminating with presentations and prizes.

The Novozymes Educate initiative contributes to workplace satisfaction, Peters says, because it is directly related to employees’ work and their lives in their communities. “Even before we had the Educate goal,” he says, “employees visited classrooms and talked about their work and careers, and related classroom learning to the real world. People get personal satisfaction from these activities.”

In Brazil, Pedro Luiz Fernandes, vice president of Corporate Affairs and Sustainability for Novozymes Latin America, led teams of scientists
Fewer job seekers

An unusual feature of the 2017 survey was that only 16% of respondents said they are likely to look for a different position in the next year. This is notably low, given that for several years after the survey began, more than one-third of participants indicated a likelihood to seek new employment, as high as 48% in 2005.

In general, statistics on job seeking by people who are already employed are scarce, so the reasons that biotech and biopharma employees feel like staying put are unknown. Yancopoulos suggests general industry trends as one answer. “When the industry is perceived as growing, people feel like they can make moves that will benefit their careers,” he says. “If fewer companies are being formed—and even fewer are focused on truly innovative science—people are happy enough with the job they have.”

Of survey respondents who were likely to seek a new job, 37% said it was for career advancement and professional growth. A company providing those benefits may be able to successfully retain employees. At Regeneron, Gandhi feels the company regularly supports her professional development. “People acknowledge your work here,” she says. “We recognize peoples’ potential and give them growth opportunities.”

Another possible reason for the low job-seeking rate, suggested by several interviewees, is that recent advances such as CRISPR technology have increased the R&D pace, giving employees the feeling that goals they have worked toward for years are within reach. Tilley feels a general sense of optimism about the capability of the industry, with progress on problems that people once saw as intractable. He names Merck & Co.’s hepatitis C treatment as an example. “We’re delivering therapy that cures the vast majority of patients,” he says. “It’s so rare to find cures.” The breakthroughs and pace are unprecedented, he says, so “maybe people are saying, ‘Let’s hang in there and see what we can do.’” O’Neil supports this suggestion: “I’ve been working in oncology for more than 15 years,” she says, “I feel like we’ve been making progress in the last few years, especially with immunotherapy.”

A lack of opportunities, pending scientific breakthroughs, or a combination of factors could be the reason that few 2017 survey respondents say they are seeking a new job. Or respondents could be feeling particularly loyal to their workplace this year, as leaders stress the value of employee contributions to their jobs and society. As Nielsen says, “Our core purpose is to do great things in the world through our products, like saving energy and water and increasing sustainability.” Internal surveys at Novozymes show that this way of making an impact excites people, he says. “That is important to loyal and motivated employees.”

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