The 2011 Science Careers Top Employers Survey was designed to identify the 20 companies with the finest reputations in the industry, as well as the characteristics that most impact an employer’s status. The results are based on 3,784 responses to a web-based survey (see survey methodology in chart below). Nearly half of the respondents are under 40 years old, 79 percent work in the United States, and 40 percent are female.

Besides innovation and research, survey respondents expect a leading company to be socially responsible, treat its employees with respect, and inspire their loyalty. This year, the #5 criteria—“has a top leadership that successfully makes changes needed to keep the organization moving in the right direction”—replaced 2010’s “has a clear vision of where the organization is headed.” (See Driving Characteristics chart below.)

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The 2011 results brought a new, first-time #1 employer: Vertex Pharmaceuticals Incorporated (#3 in 2010). In fact, three of the highest-ranking companies are new to the top 20 list (see Top 20 Employers chart below for complete company listing). These shifts aren’t surprising, because “It’s been an interesting time in the industry,” observes Alan Smith, Genzyme Corporation’s chief scientific officer before its acquisition by Sanofi. “For us, the past year has been a period of upheaval, but we’ve regularly scored well in this survey,” he notes (Genzyme is #13 this year, #8 in 2010). Now chief science advisor for Sanofi Global Research and Development, he says, “As part of Sanofi, we’ll take the approach we’ve used at Genzyme and apply it more generally.”

Other top employers are entering new phases, too. Vertex recently introduced their first drug, Incivek, to the market, and has begun building their first commercial team. “This [survey] recognition is tied directly to the passion and creativity that our 1,800 employees bring to Vertex

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each day, as we seek to change the lives of people with devastating diseases,” says Peter Mueller, Vertex’s chief science officer and executive vice president for global research and development.

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (#2, and new to the top 20 list) has a treatment for a major eye disease under FDA review. Later this year, they’ll seek FDA approval for a new cancer drug and request an additional application for Arcalyst, their first product on the market. Since Arcalyst was created for a rare genetic condition, Regeneron is now essentially developing a brand-new sales and marketing function. Explains Ross Grossman, human resources vice president, “We’ve focused a great deal of energy on retaining a true biotech culture—[stressing] innovation and great science—as we’ve grown and matured as a company. It’s especially gratifying to be recognized by Science for our science-driven culture, and to come out so high in our first year.”

Eight of this year’s top 20 companies are based in Europe. Global collaborations and concerns are increasingly important to leading biotech/pharma companies, which pay careful attention to their research facilities and services in developing countries. Health care providers in less-developed areas may not have access to the newest medical procedures and pharmaceutical treatments.

Denmark-based Novo Nordisk (#9 this year, and also new to the top 20 list) is one pharmaceutical company that is addressing a specific international need. Diabetes treatments account for about 75 percent of Novo Nordisk’s business. They provide training about best practices in diabetes care for thousands of physicians in China. “Diabetes doesn’t get the attention it deserves there because of limited resources,” observes Steve Chinn, vice president for human resources. “We’re striving to be a partner with the Chinese health care system, not simply as just a maker of medicine, but by doing more to help educate and inform patients and physicians about the severity of the disease.”
innovations that make a difference in the world,” summarizes Bryan Iams, director of external communications. “In a global company operating in every country, can they be respectful and understand that in different cultures, different beliefs drive people?” he asks. With 108,000 employees worldwide, the Germany-based company (#20; reappearing on the list since being #19 in 2006) looks for versatility and the kind of entrepreneurial thinking encouraged at Bayer’s “innovation centers” in China, Europe, and California. “These then hook into and get translated into our larger global organization,” explains Iams.

“It’s sometimes easy to hire someone just because they are an exceptional scientist, but we spend ample time to find a person with the technical skills who also fits with our core values,” says Lisa Kelly-Croswell, Vertex’s senior vice president of human resources. “We choose people who aren’t afraid to take risks—by trying something new or bringing a nontraditional idea forward—and who are not satisfied with the status quo.”

Their research and development group hires “for what we want to be, not what we are today,” says Vertex’s Mueller, who looks for people with “the scientific and technologic expertise to take Vertex to the next frontier, and the courage to constantly move the frontier forward. In science, experiments often have unexpected outcomes. Some scientists have the willingness and joy to deal with this uncertainty. That’s the phenotype we’re looking for.”

Mueller wants his scientists “maximally integrated across all functions—research, development, commercial, legal, human resources, accounting—so they can communicate and collaborate. That’s fundamental to our ultimate goal: Discovering and developing transformational medicines.”

Genzyme prefers highly trained scientists, several years beyond their Ph.D.s. “Our best hires, in a creative sense, have about five years of postdoc experience. They’re really where the excitement is in research—and they’re excited to be around,” says Smith.

In 2008, needing several hundred additional employees for a new collaboration with Sanofi-Aventis, Regeneron worked with a recruitment and branding firm to attract the right people. They launched an online ad campaign, highlighting what Grossman calls their “quirkiness and selectivity,” by presenting their recently formalized corporate values (“The Regeneron 5”), through reverse psychology:

- If science isn’t your obsession—DON’T APPLY
- If you’re content being the smartest person in the room—DON’T APPLY
- If you’re afraid to fail—DON’T APPLY
- If you think good enough is good enough—DON’T APPLY
- If you need a routine to define you—DON’T APPLY

SELECTING THE SCIENTISTS
Being an “innovative leader” continues to be the most powerful driver for selecting a company as a top employer. When asked to describe “what makes the best company, the best,” survey respondents specifically mentioned “supports a culture of innovation,” “employee-driven curiosity,” and “innovative ideas of everyone are considered.”

How do top employers create an innovative and inspiring corporate atmosphere? Among many highly qualified applicants, they search for the exceptional scientists most likely to bring fresh, original ideas to the company.

At Novo Nordisk, Chinn specifies one priority: “Passion about diabetes and hemophilia,” the two diseases for which the company creates medications. “We want people who are very knowledgeable and educated about these disease states, and who are known within their field for the research they’ve done or for being thought leaders.”

Bayer’s U.S. division seeks scientists with the “ingenuity, curiosity, and enthusiasm for working at an organization striving for
By the year’s end, Regeneron met its goal of hiring 350 highly qualified new employees.

Genentech, a member of the Roche group, (#3 this year; #1 in 8 out of 10 previous surveys) is continuously recognized for its innovative leadership, high-quality research, and talent pool. Genentech’s decision makers are extremely respectful of the company’s scientists. Emphasizing excellent communication skills, Genentech screens for a strong publication record, because they feel that it indicates an ability to communicate well in writing. “Everyone I interview is very bright, motivated, and accomplished, especially on the biology side,” observes Andy Chan, senior vice president of research biology. “But they must really want to translate biology into medicine. That’s the driving force behind who comes to Genentech, and why we’re in the business.” Some skilled scientific problem solvers, Chan believes, are far better suited for academia. “We want the ones who want to make something happen that helps people.”

At these top employers, research and development jobs aren’t only for Ph.D.s. Throughout his organization, reports Novo Nordisk’s Chinn, scientists work at many different levels. At their Seattle site, for example, some of the scientists doing fundamental research on new therapeutic areas have Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees. They’re working alongside M.D.s and Ph.D.s.

“This is such a diverse organization, we want people who bring a different perspective and understanding, so we can expand globally,” explains Susan Bunz, human resources and corporate services vice president at Pioneer Hi-Bred, a Dupont business, the plant genetics company that ranked #4 this year (a big leap from #19 in 2010). The Iowa-based company’s 3,000 plus scientists work at 110 research locations in 24 countries. “Our culture is very collaborative. People share a ‘can do’ attitude, want to work in a very dynamic environment, and know how to complete a project.”

RETAINING OUTSTANDING SCIENTISTS
The world’s best scientists are always on recruiters’ radar screens, and employers know that people often change jobs. “It’s one thing to attract new talent, another to retain them,” says Bayer’s Iams.

“You must provide an environment that recognizes accomplishment and celebrates the entire team,” Iams continues. Bayer offers growth programs, such as internal education activities, so an employee always feels, “I’m learning here.” Motivators include letters of recognition, awards (some monetary), and performance-based bonuses, which are sometimes reinvested into company shares.

However, many biotech/pharma companies are moving away from broad eligibility for stock options, according to Grossman. Regeneron, though, remains “absolutely committed to employee ownership. Every new hire will be a shareholder.” The company recently introduced an on-site “mini-MBA program” with Rutgers University professors presenting a broad view of the industry’s business issues. Beyond classrooms, “we give scientists very challenging roles, where they can contribute to the fullest extent of their abilities,” adds Grossman.

From microbiology to entomology to agronomy, Pioneer Hi-Bred uses a diverse range of expertise. A scientist’s specific assignment depends somewhat on his or her degree, explains Bunz. Ph.D.s are at the senior scientist level; a B.S.-degree holder would be an associate or assistant researcher. Thanks to the educational support Pioneer provides, “employees can go back to school while they’re here, when they see that additional education will increase their promotional opportunities.”

Novo Nordisk encourages scientists to “focus on a specific job aspect that will forward their research, and their personal development,” says Chinn. Every employee is required to prepare an “Individual Development Plan.” They can opt to attend symposia, specific educational programs, or other learning opportunities. The company gladly provides tuition “to further their employees’ education. We hope it’s holistic—not just to help Novo Nordisk, but to improve their own specialized skills,” he explains.

Vertex holds weekly “social hours” where scientists and other staff members share perspectives. The company also has unique employee incentives, such as “the Vertex Nobel Prize” for outstanding research and the recently introduced Science Technology Exchange Program (STEP), a sabbatical opportunity. Bench scientists whose proposals are accepted get to “STEP out” of their usual roles and pursue a new path for three months. The program was developed by seven Vertex scientists working in a focus group on improving career paths and recognition.

In many professions, accomplishments and recognition bring promotion into management. “For a scientist, that means moving away from the bench,” Smith observes, “but you may not want to have a hundred people reporting to you.” Genzyme offers a popular, four-level alternative track:
fellow, senior fellow, distinguished fellow, and one coveted slot as presidential fellow. “If you want to stay at the bench, a fellow here can be paid as much as a senior vice president. It’s a great way to keep people who may not want management, but want to progress. It’s very effective—these are such valuable people,” he says.

“It’s easier to do well when things are going well,” Smith reflects, “and hard to do well when times are tough. I’m very proud and pleased that we’ve scored well this year—it says that people are seeing and believing in new opportunity here. We pay a lot of attention to how we convince and keep convincing people that this is a good place to work even during a rough period. Very few people have left since the acquisition.”

INNOVATION AND RESEARCH

Two of the survey’s perennial top drivers—innovative leadership and quality research—are never taken for granted at excellent companies. They’re carefully nurtured and cultivated. “We’re highly committed to further strengthening our innovative capabilities—innovation is key to maintaining or gaining a leading position in every market in which we operate, and also the foundation for improving the lives of many millions of people,” says Katharina Jansen, director of global media relations and issues management for Bayer Schering Pharma AG in Leverkusen, Germany. She considers Bayer’s research and development investments to be long-term: Their pharmaceutical or agricultural research projects average 10 years before reaching the marketplace.

To encourage innovation, Regeneron labs operate like a hybrid of academe and business, Grossman explains. “We give researchers a great deal of freedom, and encourage employees to suggest improvements at the implementation level. Anyone comfortable with a scientific organization’s give-and-take can be part of any discussion here. We’re not yet big enough to have lots of channels, formal procedures, or hierarchies. The enemy is bureaucracy,” he says.

Regeneron is continuously seeking new approaches, says Grossman, and asking at every stage, “What’s the next generation of technology?” He elaborates: “When it wasn’t fashionable, we invested in building a technology that was then highly innovative, and brought us to our first marketable product. Then we invented a suite of techniques that led to Arcalyst.” Although Regeneron uses these successful techniques to develop other drugs, they’re also committed to ongoing innovation.

Genentech concentrates on innovations in transformative therapy. “Our strength is our patient focus,” asserts Mike Varney, senior vice president, small molecule drug discovery. “We constantly work with clinical groups to understand what’s going on with a particular disease, how it’s treated, and the limitations of existing therapies. This proximity to the patient is rare. Even with portfolio reviews, discussions center around the patients, how to help them, and the reality of improving a patient’s life.”

Genentech’s culture encourages ambitious research. “Genentech values risk-taking, creativity, and scientific exploration, which spur our scientists to succeed,” says Chan. “Once they make a breakthrough, it’s a very addicting feeling. Their success encourages more emphasis on innovation.”

With its “incredibly strong commitment to high-risk innovation, Vertex starts with a disease and
finds a way to treat its underlying cause,” says Mueller. “We’re innovative in the way we partner, how we set ourselves up as an organization, how we reach out in the community, and how we interact with patients and physicians. We balance risk on several shoulders, increasing our chances for success, through our network of global partners.”

For Pioneer Hi-Bred, global interconnections are internal. They’ve added 4,000 employees since 2007, in 95 locations. Research and development (R&D) scientists in Europe, Asia/Pacific, Latin America, and North America are in constant contact. “They know where the soils are similar and who should be collaborating. One strategy may be applicable in North and South America, but the same products don’t work globally,” explains Bunz.

Bayer takes a similar approach. “Collaboration at our worldwide locations is part of our model for success,” Iams emphasizes. “Sharing information today is so much easier than even five years ago. Other scientists can access your files to further [distant] collaborations. Now our high-growth regions are really learning from other locations, allowing much faster development in China, India, and Latin America.” All 2,500 Bayer scientists, engineers, and chemists in various labs are charged with driving innovation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT
Survey respondents indicated that the soft economy has led to layoffs, site closures, and outsourcing. When asked which key events have had the greatest effect on the industry over the past year, respondents named mergers and acquisitions, which have created some instability and uncertainty. Yet, many top employers experienced surprisingly few effects during the lengthy global recession.

“Bayer takes adequate precautions that economic instabilities do not impact R&D activities, a priority on our agenda,” says Jansen. Bayer’s R&D investments increased from €2.9 billion (US$4.06 billion) in 2009 to €3.1 billion (US$4.34 billion) in 2010 and 2011.

Another international firm, Novo Nordisk, has thrived, with 36 quarters of double-digit growth. “We actually grew, added employees, and brought new products to market last year,” says Chinn.

Regeneron also seems countercyclical, having “hired two-thirds of our employees since 2008, when we were under 700. We’ll soon reach 1,800,” says Grossman. “At the end of 2010, 43 percent of employees had been here one year or less.”

Like Regeneron, Genentech has been expanding. Since 2008, as cutbacks left talented professionals unemployed, the company has been “very lucky to hire some exceptionally qualified scientists,” says Varney. “Our small molecule group, and research in general, have been growing, while the rest of the industry is contracting. Being a little out of sync allowed us to cherry-pick the very best.”

Weather, not economics, is the biggest variable for Pioneer Hi-Bred. “We continue to create products to deal with weather factors,” says Bunz. An innovative new drought-resistant product, AquaMax, is for areas with a dry climate or too little rainfall for farming. New products have to be tested in-ground in a target-type location, but uncooperative weather can prevent planting. In areas with a single growing season, that can delay testing for an entire year.

CORPORATE CULTURE
Three of this year’s top five drivers reflect workplace values and environment. To survey respondents, outstanding employers are socially responsible and have loyal employees whom they treat with respect.

“What we do to shape our culture comes from listening to employees,” notes Vertex’s Kelly-Croswell. “We hold numerous focus groups, often in-the-moment. We take what we hear and translate it into action. Employees routinely tell us, ‘Hey, thanks for asking.’”

Leading companies often codify their corporate values, as exemplified by “The Regeneron 5.” “Not only do we hire scientists who will treat patients with respect, we also expect them to respect each other,” asserts Chinn. The recently revised “Novo Nordisk Way” stresses accountability and responsibility. “Our employees have a right and a responsibility to say something if they see people not treating someone else well. Being an organization focused on just a few therapeutic areas, rather than many, makes us different, and gives us a shared sense of commitment.”

Bayer, too, recently updated its global corporate values statement, choosing an acronym easily remembered in many languages: LIFE. It stands for Leadership, Integrity, Flexibility, and Efficiency. The company seeks to keep its culture consistent throughout all locations. “LIFE encourages
individual employees to make decisions, to take the lead whenever they see things they think could be changed or adapted. The culture empowers our research scientists to think independently, see ideas and solutions, and propose or just implement whatever helps the company move towards our larger vision,” Iams summarizes.

“This is the only place I’ve ever worked,” declares Vertex’s Kelly-Croswell, “where everyone can recite our core values, because we all live them: Fearless pursuit of excellence; innovation is our life-blood; and ‘we’ wins.”

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Social responsibility is increasingly significant to both survey respondents and excellent employers. It rose from ranking #5 in 2010 to #3 this year. The increased emphasis among survey respondents mirrors a global trend: Eighty-six percent of citizens worldwide believe that companies need to place at least as much emphasis on society’s interests as they do on business interests, according to a 2010 study by Edelman Global Public Relations (www.goodpurposecommunity.com).

The highest-ranking companies in the Science Careers Top Employers Survey take environmental concerns and community involvement seriously. Many larger companies have foundations that manage their philanthropic and humanitarian efforts. The traditions are especially strong in European-based businesses.

Bayer, for example, began demonstrating a strong concern for environmental issues as early as 1901. In 2004, it became the first private-sector business to partner with the United Nations Environment Programme in the areas of youth and environment. Since the late 90s, Bayer has annually given €$1.2 million (US$1.68 million) plus noncash contributions for environmental education programs. Over two million students in Asia have participated in these environmental education programs. In Bayer’s Young Environmental Envoy Program, students chosen by their home communities in fast-growing, emerging economies—including Thailand, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Kenya, Ecuador, and Korea—attend an intensive one-week study program in Germany. “They gain first-hand experience in the principles and applications of modern environmental protection, and learn how industry, government, and private households interact in environmental programs,” explains Iams.

“With our Danish heritage, social responsibility was essentially built into Novo Nordisk,” explains Chinn. “It’s such a big part of who we are. We know we have a financial responsibility to shareholders—and we also have a social and environmental responsibility.”

Initially, the company donated DKK$650 million (US$122 million) for a 10-year period. In 2008, shareholders approved an additional DKK$575 million (US$108 million) for the next decade. Although the foundation operates independently, Novo Nordisk’s Chief Executive Officer, Lars Rebien Sørenson, is on its board of directors.

The World Diabetes Foundation focuses on neglected areas of diabetes care, such as preventing
unnecessary foot amputations or blindness resulting from the disease. These problems, particularly prevalent in poorer communities, receive little attention from international diabetes organizations. So far, the World Diabetes Foundation has funded 253 projects in developing countries, and paved the way for improved access to diabetes care and screening. Already, its efforts have inspired Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya to include chronic diabetes care in their national health policies.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
Socially responsible companies sometimes tackle a community problem near one of their facilities. Pioneer Hi-Bred’s Thailand team discovered that students in several provinces received inadequate nutrition from their school lunch programs because of insufficient funds. At that time, only US$0.56 per day was needed to feed a child well. In 2002, Pioneer Thailand formed an innovative collaboration among schools, communities, and local businesses to improve students’ nourishment. Pioneer donated high-yielding hybrid corn seed, supplies, and supervision; schools provided land; and each community contributed labor to raise a corn crop. After each harvest, the schools used proceeds from crop sales to fund healthier lunches. Local farmers, gaining valuable experience with seed technology and agricultural practices, began improving regional corn production. Entering its tenth year, Pioneer Hi-Bred’s “Corn for Student Lunch Program,” involving 14,000 people, has estimated revenues exceeding US$330,000, which is shared among all 43 participating schools.

“We just received an award in Dar es Salaam from the president of Tanzania,” reports Genzyme’s Smith. “It’s for HAND (Humanitarian Assistance for Neglected Diseases), our malaria research program that looks for new drugs,” he explains. In collaboration with the Broad Institute of Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Genzyme’s focus in Africa is on screening for malaria, on-site.

“During the sales meetings that are held in various U.S. locations, Novo Nordisk gets in touch with local communities to see what we can do to help them,” says Chinn. “We’ve built bikes for kids with diabetes. I’ve personally put together ‘care packages’ for the homeless in cities we’ve visited. We’re not just delivering a medication, we believe we have to be part of the community.”

Some employers have to match social responsibility activities with their available resources. “We don’t have deep pockets, or a foundation,” notes Regeneron’s Grossman. “We’re not yet profitable—we’re small but fast-growing, with one approved product. We mobilize our employees to become involved in ‘give-back’ programs in local communities.”

Vertex Pharmaceuticals has a similar perspective. “We probably sold the first thing in our company’s history two weeks ago,” jokes Kelly-Croswell, “so we’re mostly giving of our time.” The company’s online community network encourages anyone involved with a local organization (professionally or privately) to post and ask for volunteers.

In 2009, Vertex’s founder stepped down after 20 years. “As our parting gift, instead of a trophy, we announced the annual company-wide Joshua Boger Day of Service in his honor. All six global locations have coordinated service opportunities on the same day,” Kelly-Croswell notes. Near their Cambridge, Massachusetts headquarters, the company’s largest site, employees choose from 15 events, ranging from zoo projects to assembling care packages for military personnel to Habitat for Humanity projects. In 2009, about 800 employees took part. In 2010, the 1,100 Joshua Boger Day participants included a team of 15 scientists from the San Diego site. They presented “A Day in the Life of a Scientist/Engineer” to middle- and high-school students throughout the city’s school districts.

Genzyme, another Cambridge, Massachusetts-based company, has always had community outreach programs. “We do things like Earth Day initiatives, bike rides for cancer, and walks for the March of Dimes,” says Smith. “They’re very popular with the staff, because they feel like they’re giving back. It’s surprising how important that kind of activity is to generating the right atmosphere around a place.”

Genentech’s Chan praises his employer for its significant philanthropic work on behalf of patients. The Genentech Foundation, established in 2002, provides financial support to carefully chosen local and national not-for-profit patient education and advocacy efforts in the United States.

The grants are intended for projects that enhance patients’ understanding of their disease, provide support through diagnosis and treatment, and improve their ability to obtain appropriate health care for a serious illness. Recent contributions have focused on support and education programs for patients with cancer or with a diagnosed immunological disorder. Grant recipients include the Children’s Cancer Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, Guide Dogs
for the Blind, the Jack & Jill Late-Stage Cancer Foundation, and the Lupus Foundation of America.

Genentech’s Varney “is very conscious of publishing our work. That’s not only good for our science from a reputation perspective, but it’s part of moving science forward in the world. Most companies keep a lot of their work as trade secrets. Genentech has more publications than any other pharmaceutical company.” Noting the high quality of the journals where their research appears, he adds, “We feel publishing our work serves the advancement of the science.”

At its sprawling South San Francisco headquarters, with nearly 50 buildings and 9,000 employees, Genentech encourages employee use of public transportation with an on-campus bus system. A fleet of free company buses transports employees throughout the Bay Area, so staff members don’t have to use their cars.

ENCOURAGING FUTURE SCIENTISTS
Cultivating future scientists is extremely popular among top employers. “Our company leaders are scientists who take science education seriously, no matter what size we’re at,” declares Regeneron’s Grossman. “We have 75 high-school and college interns,” says Grossman, “and we’ve come full-circle. One of our high-school interns now is a patient who suffers from the condition that our first drug treats.”

For Vertex’s STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Initiative, staff scientists volunteer in local schools and engage kids in activities that foster their enthusiasm for science. The company collaborates with the local United Way to bring six-to-ten-year-olds to Vertex for hands-on science exploration, like visiting the formulation labs to learn how a pill is made. “Throughout the day, the kids have a chance to communicate with all sorts of scientists,” says Mueller. “These types of programs are mission-critical. Unfortunately, in our society the science and technology track is no longer the most wanted. We have to engage kids when they’re young so that science becomes understandable to them and fun. As a company, but also as a society, we need to nurture that.”

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