Is it possible to have a successful career in science, and have a life too? Yes, if you’re working for the right company and you’re ready to ask for what you need, says Lori Morton, associate director of cardiovascular research at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc., which is #1 on the 2012 Science Careers Top Employers Survey—afer making the list for the first time ever, at #2, last year. “I really believe that having an engaged parenthood and career success are not incompatible ideas here,” says Morton, who has worked at the Tarrytown, New York-based biotech for 10 years and has two young children.

Despite continued gloom on the global economic front, Regeneron, Novo Nordisk (up to #4 from #9 last year), Celgene (#12, first time in the top 20), and many more of the companies that made this year’s list are continuing to hire scientists and invest in research and development. Not only that: In an environment where layoffs, benefit cuts, and hiring freezes still seem to be the rule, these well-respected companies are focused not just on getting the most out of their employees, but on helping them live balanced, healthy lives. These companies have recognized that these two things are far from mutually exclusive.

“We of course focus on innovation and the development of new products, and therefore we focus very much on people,” says Mario Watzke, head of human resources marketing and employer branding at Roche (excluding Genentech), which moved up to #8 on the list this year from #15, making the top 10 list for the first time. (Genentech, a member of the Roche group, is #3 this year). Roche’s concern for its employees shows itself in benefits ranging from an Olympic-size swimming pool for employee use at the company’s Basel headquarters to flexible schedules, on-site kindergartens, a babysitting service, and a nanny finder. Other unusual benefits offered by this year’s top 20 employers include health insurance for pets (Novo Nordisk); in-office massage and visits from the
### Top Twenty Employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012 Rank</th>
<th>2011 Rank</th>
<th>Employer (Global Headquarters)</th>
<th>Innovative leader in the industry</th>
<th>Treats employees with respect</th>
<th>Is socially responsible</th>
<th>Has loyal employees</th>
<th>Does important, quality research</th>
<th>Makes changes needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (Tarrytown, NY)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vertex Pharmaceuticals Incorporated (Cambridge, MA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Genentech (South San Francisco, CA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Novo Nordisk (Bagsvaerd, Denmark)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Monsanto Company (Creve Coeur, MO)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Company (Cambridge, MA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Boehringer Ingelheim (Ingelheim, Germany)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Roche – excluding Genentech (Basel, Switzerland)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Biogen Idec (Weston, MA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>DuPont (Wilmington, DE)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Novartis (Basel, Switzerland)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Celgene (Summit, NJ)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Asten (Thousand Oaks, CA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Merck KGaA/Merck Serono/EMD Serono (Darmstadt, Germany)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Abbott (Abbott Park, IL)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Genzyme, a Sanofi company (Cambridge, MA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Syngenta (Basel, Switzerland)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Gilead Sciences (Foster City, CA)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Biocon Limited (Bengaluru, India)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bayer (Leverkusen, Germany)</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 20 companies with the best reputations as employers and the top three driving characteristics for each company, according to respondents in the 2012 survey undertaken for the Science/AAAS Custom Publishing Office. The companies without a 2011 rank did not receive enough mentions to qualify or did not receive a high enough ranking during the 2011 survey.

Ice-cream truck (Regeneron); deliveries of farm-fresh vegetables to the office (Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research, the research and development division of Novartis, #11); and annual health checks for all employees (Biocon Limited, #19).

### WHAT MAKES A TOP EMPLOYER

Every year, *Science* commissions a survey to identify the biotech and pharma companies considered to be the top employers in the industry, and also to determine which qualities scientists use to make this judgment. This year’s results are based on 4,276 responses to a web-based survey (see above chart for a description of survey methodologies).

Fifty-six percent of survey respondents work in biotech, and 35 percent for a pharmaceutical company. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents were male, 37 percent were female, and 5 percent said they preferred not to respond. Eighty-five percent were 30 or older (data not shown), and 37 percent have a doctorate degree. Most (60 percent) say they have established their careers (data not shown), but are still moving upward, and 70 percent have been working for at least 10 years.

Twenty-three percent of respondents reported working in basic research, 30 percent in applied research, and 30 percent in development.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents were based in North America, 14 percent in Europe, and 5 percent in the Asia/Pacific Rim.

For the 11th year in a row, survey respondents ranked “innovative leader” as the most powerful driver of their choice of best company, followed by “treats employees with respect,” “is socially responsible,” “has loyal employees,” “does important, quality research,” and “makes changes needed.”
Two companies, Monsanto Company (from #16 to #5) and Roche (from #15 to #8), made the top 10 list for the first time this year, while Biocon is a newcomer to the top 20. Vertex Pharmaceuticals Incorporated (#2), Genentech (#3), Millennium: The Takeda Oncology Company (#6), Boehringer Ingelheim (#7), Biogen Idec (#9), and DuPont (#10) round out the top 10. (See chart for a full list of the top 20.)

INNOVATION IN EVERYTHING

“Innovative leader” doesn’t just describe the research the top 20 companies do or the products they make; it also characterizes a company’s approach to recruiting and retaining the best talent, their strategies for growth, and their corporate culture.

It can even mean becoming a player in social media, like Boehringer Ingelheim, which has won recognition for its Facebook-based HealthSeeker social game, which helps people with diabetes learn how to make healthy lifestyle changes with their Facebook friends’ support.

Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research (NIBR), which currently employs more than 6,500 scientists in over 10 different locations across the globe, got its start a decade ago, when the Basel-based pharma giant decided to headquarter its research and development operations in Cambridge, Massachusetts—a bold and innovative move in and of itself. And NIBR’s mission is also unique, explains Mark Sawyer, global head of human resources for NIBR. “It’s not the pursuit of the blockbuster; it’s simply pursuing unmet medical needs, and not being driven by the market.”

Project teams are built around key scientific questions, Sawyer adds, not market opportunities, and NIBR works hard to foster collaboration and keep the organization as flat as possible. “There’s a great deal of emphasis on, if you like, the sociology of how we construct the labs and how we encourage people to work together,” he adds.

And it works: Only 2 percent of hires leave the company within their first 12 months on the job, giving NIBR the lowest turnover of any division within Novartis. As of 2011, the company had more than 130 projects in clinical development, and is well-prepared for the expiration of the patent on its blockbuster drug Diovan in 2013, according to Sawyer. “Nearly 30 percent of revenue is now gleaned from recently launched products, and we’re seeing significant growth in emerging markets.”

SUPPORTING HARD WORK, FAMILY LIFE

Since its founding, Regeneron leadership has focused on making the company a science-driven blend of academia and industry. “I think Regeneron’s founders sought to create something that was the best of both worlds, where you have the scientific freedom of academia but in a much more collaborative environment, where you wouldn’t have the isolation of individual academic labs,” Morton says. “The idea was to generate something that was fully collaborative, really capitalizing on the intellectual horsepower that they had brought in and anticipating that that would be a synergistic relationship, resulting in discoveries on a much grander scale than the sum of individual contributions.”

One particularly attractive aspect of Regeneron for Scott Walsh, associate director of the formulation development group, who came to the company six years ago from a small biotech company, is that it encourages and fosters his intellectual curiosity. “One of the cool things about Regeneron is that I know what VelociGene [the company’s proprietary technologies for modifying the mouse genome] does, even though it’s a department that’s far, far removed from what I do,” he says. “Regeneron actually organizes seminars where we can go and learn about other parts of the company,” he adds. “I get to maintain my overall scientific interest by going to these seminars and learning about other departments.”
George Yancopoulos, Regeneron’s executive vice president and chief scientific officer, takes pride in the intellectual curiosity of his employees, and the freedom they feel to express themselves. “It’s ideas over formality and protocol. We believe that a research technician can have ideas as good as the CSO’s, and it happens all the time,” he adds. “We really have a think-tank and brainstorming-type approach.”

“We give our scientists much greater freedom to go where the science takes them to do innovative things; we’re not constantly hounding them about expenses and minor administrative details,” says Ross Grossman, Regeneron’s vice president of human resources. Among the most innovative benefits the company offers to employees, he adds, is plenty of support for their lives outside the company. “Because we demand so much of our people, we offer highly subsidized in-home or in-facility child care and adult day care, so that if something happens and your child can’t go to school or you have a problem with your aged parent, we can help.”

Leonard S. Schleifer, a neurologist and assistant professor at Columbia University, founded Regeneron in 1988 with the goal of using gene technology to regenerate neurons. The following year, Yancopoulos, then a molecular immunologist also at Columbia, opened Regeneron’s labs in Tarrytown. Schleifer continues to lead the company as president and chief executive officer.

In 2008, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the company’s first drug, the interleukin-1 inhibitor Arcalyst (rilonacept), for treating cryoprin-associated periodic syndromes, which are extremely rare diseases. In 2011, the FDA approved Regeneron’s Eylea (aflibercept), an antibody fragment that helps maintain vision in patients with wet age-related macular degeneration. The drug is expected to reach hundreds of millions of dollars in sales annually. Both drugs were created with Regeneron’s Trap technology for making “decoy receptors.”

The company now has an array of fully human antibodies in its pipeline created with its proprietary VelocImmune mouse, which has been engineered to express human antibody genes while still mounting a robust immune response by making antibodies with fully human variable regions and mouse constant regions. “This is by orders of magnitude the largest genetic engineering project ever undertaken by scientists, and it worked,” says Yancopoulos.

“During the first half of our existence we were criticized for being a ‘research boutique,’” explains Yancopoulos. “They said, ‘Oh, you’re doing great science, but the company doesn’t know how to produce products.’” At the same time, he added, many in the industry were so heavily focused on products that they were cutting in-house research and development and licensing in new drugs.

Now, while the drying up of pipelines has become a common lament for the industry, Yancopoulos adds that Regeneron has in development more than 10 therapeutics in the areas of inflammation, metabolism, oncology, ophthalmology, and pain. And thanks to the VelocImmune mouse—which has brought in $2 billion in licensing and collaboration fees over the past five years alone, according to Yancopoulos—these therapeutics are being developed at record speed. This means, he says, that the scientists get to see the results of their work in real time.

“Many of us grow up with the dream that we’re going to be able to do important science, to help and advance humankind in some way,” Yancopoulos says. “We haven’t just said it and dreamt it, but we’ve been doing it, over and over again.”

Says Morton: “In research at Regeneron, the starting point is that we can accomplish anything, and I think when your scientists start with that mindset they will accomplish amazing things as a result.”

THInKIng, And AcTIng, gLoBALLy

Bangalore-based integrated biopharmaceutical company Biocon made the top 20 list for the first time this year, in the #19 spot. Syngene, Biocon’s contract research arm, and Clinigene, its clinical development branch, have long collaborated successfully with companies overseas, but Biocon has become an R&D power in its own right, with its own global reach. The company, founded in 1978 by Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, began setting up its first overseas manufacturing facility in Malaysia in 2011, and recently launched the world’s first humanized anti-epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) monoclonal antibody, nimotuzumab, which is also the first novel biologic to be developed in India.

Biocon’s story underscores the increasingly global nature of the biopharma industry—and the importance of India, China, and other emerging markets not just as testing grounds and markets for drugs, but as resources for scientific and commercial collaboration. In April, the company opened a state-of-the-art, 200,000-square-foot biologics R&D complex that employs more than 300 scientists and was inaugurated by Chemistry Nobel Laureate Kurt Wuthrich. The center is the
India, after its purchase of Pirimal Healthcare’s formulations business for $3.72 billion in 2010. Biocon’s plans to expand internationally took a hit this year when Pfizer pulled out of a planned $350 million agreement to market biosimilars of human insulin in the United States and other key markets; however, the company has retained a substantial portion of the $200 million received from Pfizer to continue with its development obligations. The company now plans to work with regional partners and build new alliances in order to sell its insulin products.

A host of other deals between leading biopharma companies and their counterparts in the developing world have taken place over the past few months. Amgen (#13 this year, down from #6 in 2011) purchased Turkey’s Mustafa Nevzat Pharmaceuticals, a maker of injectable generic drugs, for $700 million. Merck KGaA (which includes Merck Serono/EMD Serono and is #14 this year) announced it would invest $1.5 billion in R&D in China over the next five years, and Novartis (back up to #11 after being #14 in 2011 and #11 in 2010) has cut jobs in the United States and Europe while adding employees in China and India.

**Don Foster**, head of research in immunology at Novo Nordisk’s R&D center in Seattle, says working with colleagues across cultures—and continents—is a very effective way to get scientists thinking outside of the box. “In research and development, especially in research, getting diversity of thought is one of the most critical things that you can do to get innovation,” he explains. Scientists at the company are encouraged to shuttle among the company’s R&D sites in Denmark, the United States, and China, by doing job rotations overseas, taking expat assignments, and going on extended business trips, according to **Rebecca Capuano**, the company’s senior director of human resources.

“Diversity is so important to us, and this gift of being in so many sites around the world enables the diversity,” says NIBR’s Sawyer. The company’s “mini-sabbaticals,” which offer NIBR associates the opportunity to work at other sites for up to three months, have been “extremely valuable and popular,” he adds.

Africa has also emerged as an important partner for the three agricultural chemical producers in the top 20. All have made major commitments to expand their business on the continent. DuPont (#10) announced it would invest $3 million over the next three years to help Ethiopian smallholder farmers achieve food security. In July of this year, the company opened a new office in Lagos, Nigeria, to serve as the hub for its operations in West Africa. Monsanto has said it plans to spend $50 million over the next 10 years in Africa. Syngenta (#17), the world’s largest agrochemical company, said it will invest $500 million in Africa, from which it expects to reap $1 billion in revenues over the next decade.

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

The responses to this year’s survey make it clear that helping patients, doing important science, and maybe even changing the world are important to scientists working in biopharma. When asked about the advantages of working in the industry, “positively impacting lives” came first, followed by “fulfilling careers,” “stability,” and “salary/benefits.”

And the companies on this year’s top 20 list make it clear that scientists working in the industry...
can indeed “do well by doing good.”

Celgene, a Summit, New Jersey-based company and a top 20 newcomer, was spun off by Celanese Corporation in 1986. “In the early part of our history we developed our focus on orphan diseases,” explains Greg Geissman, director of public relations at the global biopharmaceutical company.

The company in-licensed thalidomide in 1992 and received FDA approval to market the drug (as Thalomid) for treating severe cutaneous manifestations of leprosy in 1998 and for treating multiple myeloma in combination with dexamethasone in 2006. Over its history, Celgene has made a number of diverse acquisitions to expand its portfolio of cancer drugs, most recently purchasing Abraxane maker Abraxis Pharmaceuticals in 2010.

Celgene invests an unusually large 30 percent of its revenue back into research and development, Geissman points out. (The industry average in 2010, according to a Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America survey, was 17 percent).

“The continued significant investment shows up in the fact that currently we have more than 25 phase 3 and pivotal studies ongoing in a range of diseases,” Geissman says. Celgene’s pipeline includes several oral drugs for solid tumors and hematologic cancers and cellular therapies for Crohn’s disease, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and sarcoidosis.

Scientists at Celgene see their work as a vocation, and they also feel supported in taking constructive risks in their research, says Carol Thompson, senior director of human resources at the company. Both Thompson and Geissman say the company’s focus on connecting scientists with patients is also unique.

“It’s the only place I’ve worked at where employees have the opportunity to directly connect with the patients,” Thompson says. “That makes what we do come to life. We’ve had patients actually at our town hall meetings. We’ve had a number of opportunities to see and hear our patients and their gratitude, and to see their hope and their encouragement for surviving that much longer because they’re taking our drugs.”

PROUD TO BE “PATIENT-CENTRIC”

Novo Nordisk, the world’s largest maker of insulin, is also a company that’s proud of its “patient-centric” approach. “We look at everything we do from the lens of the patient,” Capuano says.

In 2009, the company opened an R&D facility in Seattle dedicated to producing biologics for treating autoimmune diseases. Foster says he agreed to head up this research at the facility because he believes in what Novo Nordisk does, and how the company goes about doing it. “I’ve had type 1 diabetes myself for 35 years, and I’ve seen the impact that innovation can have on the quality of life of people with a chronic disease,” he says. “We can manufacture the missing component and provide a relatively normal life and normal life span for people with fatal diseases.”

“I’m a big believer in biologics,” Foster adds. “They have huge specificity advantages over small molecules. Biologics are fundamentally nature’s way of regulating disease, so we’re manufacturing almost the perfect drug.”

Clinical data is now coming in from one of the company’s first antibodies, for treating rheumatoid arthritis. “It’s encouraging us to believe that there are therapeutics that can not only manage the pain and inflammation of diseases like that, but also potentially impact bone destruction,” Foster says.

Scientists working at Novo Nordisk’s Seattle facility benefit from the excitement of working in an environment that has a biotech startup feel, while at the same time enjoying the stability of being employed by a large, financially healthy organization, which just marked its 40th consecutive quarter of double-digit revenue growth. “It’s thriving and it’s stable, and that means the company has the ability to be not only short-term but long-term focused,” says Foster.

“We’re probably one of the few companies right now that are making long-term commitments in focused research and development, and are fortunate to have the ability to do that,” Capuano says. At around $1.5 billion, she points out, the company’s R&D spending rivals the National Institutes of Health’s funding for diabetes research.

And Novo Nordisk’s financial health means it can offer some unique benefits, including a concierge, health insurance for pets, and “lunch and learn” sessions with college coaches to help parents preparing to send their kids off to university, she adds. “Although the pharmaceutical industry might, at least in the past, have gotten beat up for their extravagant ways,” Capuano
continues, “I think at Novo we give back to our employees and we give back to our communities.”

Social responsibility came at #3 on this year’s survey’s list of major drivers for what makes a company a great employer, and this year’s top employers have found a number of creative ways to serve local communities. These efforts can range from drives to gather goods for the needy to helping out with local science fairs.

Regeneron employees volunteer when the Cell Motion Bio Bus, a molecular biology lab on wheels with research-grade equipment on board, comes to visit local schools, and they also mentor high-school students who come to work in the company’s labs. “There’s a lot of nurturing of science here,” says Grossman.

The Biocon Foundation invests heavily in the health and welfare of its neighbors. Its Arogya Raksha Yojana Health Micro Insurance Plan has more than 100,000 members, 90 percent of whom pay for their own insurance. Members are enrolled via mobile phone. The foundation also runs nine primary health care clinics in the rural and urban regions served by its micro-insurance plan and holds three to four monthly health camps in more remote areas. Other community efforts include construction of sanitation infrastructure at a pilgrimage site near Bangalore City and building and upgrading local primary schools.

STABILITY, CHANGE, OR BOTH?

This year’s survey respondents listed “stability,” including job security and industry growth, as one of the key advantages of working in biopharma. But respondents also named “change”—mergers and acquisitions, reorganizations, outsourcing, market forces, employees moving between companies, and decreasing innovation—as the main disadvantage of employment in the industry, followed by “negative image,” “workplace conditions,” and “government influence.”

Nevertheless, just one in five survey respondents said they were likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months. A third of those who expected to begin a job search said their goals were career advancement and professional growth; 17 percent were seeking new challenges and experiences; 13 percent wanted to leave their current job due to leadership, management, or supervision issues; 11 percent were planning to look for work because they were not happy with the work environment or culture or the stress of working for their current employer; while 11 percent wanted a better salary and benefits.

Working in biopharma can definitely be a wild ride, and many scientists will find themselves involved in multiple mergers, acquisitions, and spinoffs throughout their careers (see “Navigating Biotech/Pharma Mergers and Acquisitions” article, June 8, scim.ag/QFnuM).

But the health of the industry means that talented, experienced scientists can expect to land another—maybe better—job after being laid off. R&D spending was essentially flat between 2007 and 2009, but has begun to climb again, according to Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) data. While the number of U.S. jobs overall fell by 6 percent between 2007 and 2009, according to data from Battelle, biotech jobs were up by 0.2 percent during the same period. Big pharma employment shrank 4.8 percent, while there was a 3.6 percent increase in jobs

Comparison of the top 10 companies on the basis of the top three drivers (scored out of 100): Socially responsible (bubble width), Innovative leader (x-axis), and Treats employees with respect (y-axis).
at research, testing, and medical labs.

Some parts of the country are doing better than others. Washington, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and California saw significant growth in biotechnology research employment between 2007 and 2010, while Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Michigan, and Maryland shed biotech R&D jobs.

The financial health and diversity of many of the companies on this year’s top 20 list mean their R&D programs have been sheltered from the economic storm. “Funding internal research and development is a strategic long term investment for building a strong pipeline,” says Sawyer. Novartis has been steadfast in this commitment over the past 10 years, he adds, as the company continues to invest approximately 20 percent of its revenue annually in R&D.

LETTING EMPLOYEES FOLLOW THEIR PASSION

NIBR and several other top 20 employers take pride in allowing their scientists to create their own career paths within the company. One of the most innovative things about Monsanto, says Kelly Franklin Brendel, chemistry strategy and operations lead at the St. Louis-based Fortune 500 company, is the freedom the company gives its employees to follow their interests and passions—even if that means going into a totally different division. And if an employee wants to stay where they are and become a “super expert” in that area, their wishes will be honored as well, she says.

Brendel started at Monsanto as an engineer in manufacturing 20 years ago. “It does not feel like I’ve been around that long,” she adds. “It says a lot about the opportunities the company provides when you can feel renewed all the time.”

“Our culture is one that ensures people have multiple development opportunities,” says Melissa Harper, vice president of talent acquisition and diversity lead at Monsanto. “We certainly, in our culture, recognize that our competitive advantage relies on our ability to attract great talent, but at the same time develop and retain that talent.”

Monsanto has set up awards—some with financial incentives—to recognize employee contributions, including the Queeny Award (named for John F. Queeny, who founded the original Monsanto in 1901), the Science and Technology Career Award, and the Technology Above and Beyond Award. Employees can also take advantage of flexible work schedules and job sharing; leading-edge wellness programs; assistance with adoption; assistance with child care and financial planning for college; and help with elder care. Uniquely, part-time employees at Monsanto are also eligible for benefits.

Allowing employees to follow their own passions and interests is a key part of Regeneron’s culture as well, Yancopoulos says. “We have some people who’ve been doing basic science and technology development from day one, and they’re very happy to stay on that side,” he adds. “It’s a very flexible set of opportunities we have. That’s a good way to keep people. If you take advantage of what people are interested in, they produce better stuff.”

At Regeneron, Morton says, “your success is rewarded with opportunity and the ability to do more, which often involves more work but results in the chance to succeed even further.” The company has a comprehensive training and development program to help scientists make the transition from working at the bench to becoming leaders within the organization, according to Morton.

Other top employers share this commitment to helping scientists build their knowledge and skills. Roche offers more than 400 different courses on topics ranging from leadership and management to safety. “There are plenty of opportunities, and what we are also pretty proud of is how we train and develop our people,” says Watzke. “We are running huge development programs, not just for the senior leaders but for everyone.”

When recruiting, Watzke adds, Roche doesn’t focus only on finding the smartest scientists. “We don’t hire for skills, we hire for attitudes,” he says. “The skills are the basics you have to bring to the table anyway. We want to have people who are fitting into the working culture, and that’s the most important thing...they have to fit into the team, they have to like it.” So the company works hard to show potential recruits just what that working culture is all about—and employees are happy to share this information too. Of their own accord, several scientists at the Basel site put together a video showing themselves talking about what it’s like to work at the company, Watzke adds.

The social factor is important for Regeneron, as well. “Being the best or being the most accomplished or the most brilliant is not enough here,” Morton says. “To be a Regeneron person
you also have to have personality. Personality and charisma are highly valued here. Because in addition to wanting everyone to have a healthy balance of their personal life and their work, they want to work to be a pleasant place to be, so I think there’s really a strong effort to recruit people who are nice to be around.”

And while Regeneron obviously values hard work, it doesn’t demand face time. “We really encourage people to be as efficient with their time as possible, because it doesn’t help anybody to work endless hours. It’s not healthy. I don’t think anyone who has that work ethic is really working efficiently.”

While Morton says she certainly works hard—typically logging a “reasonable nine-hour day”—she feels comfortable taking the time to call her child’s school, make a doctor’s appointment, or, as she did this spring, leave early to go to her daughter’s preschool graduation.

“The key to that is feeling comfortable, is saying that this is what I need and this is why I’m leaving early, to not be vague about it and say ‘I have an appointment,’ but to feel comfortable saying ‘I’m going to my daughter’s preschool graduation,’ and have them say ‘Great, bring pictures back,’” Morton says. “That is the attitude and the culture, and that’s what I think makes Regeneron such a healthy place to be.”

Anne Harding is a freelance science writer based near New York City.

10.1126/science.opms.r1200125

Published in advance of print on September 21, 2012. Print edition available on October 19.

Upcoming Features

China Regional Focus—September 28
Neuroscience Careers—October 5
Top Employers Survey (print edition)—October 19