

Building a Learning-Centered Company Culture

Founded in 1956 on a handshake between Al Golin and McDonald's founder Ray Kroc, Golin/Harris International is a public relations firm with a strong marketing heritage and consumer focus. It offers world-class expertise in corporate/employee communications, public affairs, health care, technology, and financial and investor relations. The firm specializes in long-term partnerships with some of the best-known and respected brand names and companies in the world, including McDonald's Corporation, Bayer, Lowe's Companies, Inc., Texas Instruments Incorporated, Tyson Foods Inc., Sprint, and Wm. Wrigley, Jr. Company. Headquartered in Chicago, Golin/Harris International employs 1,100 people in 23 offices worldwide.

Three industry-specific issues have strongly influenced the direction of the Golin/Harris employee development system. First, in the business of public relations, employees are a company's primary assets. As PR professionals like to say, "In this business, the inventory goes down in the elevator every evening." To maintain its competitive edge, Golin/Harris must attract and retain the very best people.

Second, public relations is a highly demanding business. It is crisis-driven, with a relentless pace, and a high potential for burnout. To recruit and retain employees, Golin/Harris strives to be the preferred place to work in the PR world, so the firm offers a work environment that is nurturing, stimulating, personally fulfilling, and even fun.

Third, over the past few years, Golin/Harris clients have been requesting additional, more sophisticated services. Increasingly, clients expect the firm's consultants to participate in high-level company strategy sessions and discussions that extend well beyond traditional PR and marketing issues. This shift in client expectations requires that Golin/Harris employees possess an ever-widening range of skills and knowledge in order to contribute intelligently to upper-management level issues.

To address these industry needs, Golin/Harris has expanded and refocused its training and educational opportunities to become, according to employees, "much more sophisticated." The Golin/Harris employee development system is now designed to invest in each employee as a whole person, not simply provide job-specific skills training. This system provides:

- ◆ A culture that supports employee learning
- ◆ A wide array of formal and informal training and education opportunities
- ◆ Related developmental activities that help employees pursue outside interests and maintain an appropriate work/life balance

Leadership Vision and Commitment

Golin/Harris invests substantial resources in employee development, integrating learning and development activities into its operations at all levels. "I believe," said CEO Rich Jernstedt, "it is the company's responsibility to provide the learning resources; the manager's responsibility to provide the support and time; and the employee's responsibility to take the initiative."

COMPANY STATS

Name	Golin/Harris International
Industry	Public Relations
Number of Employees	1,100; 190 in Chicago region
Location	Headquartered in Chicago; offices in United States, Latin America, Europe, and Asia
Product/Service	Public relations services in consumer marketing, public affairs, investor relations, health care, and corporate and employee communications
Year Founded	1956
Ownership	Public; part of the Interpublic Group of Companies
Web Address	www.golinharris.com

Expanding Skills and Knowledge

All employees develop an annual plan for the training and development activities they hope to complete; and they are expected to spend an average of 40 hours annually on learning activities. All internal training is offered on company time. Supervisors work with employees to balance billable hours with learning activities. "Managers expect you to continue to learn and grow and to use what you learn," said one employee.

The annual performance reviews of front-line supervisors include an assessment of their support of their staff's training and professional development. Supervisors can access an agency-wide database to update and monitor their staff's training and development progress. These managers are also encouraged to access learning opportunities themselves, and to cover for one another so they too can take time to work on their own developmental needs.

The CEO, Rich Jernstedt, personally fosters employee learning and development by serving as emcee for the three-day middle managers' training conference, sending personal notes of encouragement to participants in the Leadership In Action program, and referring to upcoming training opportunities in his monthly "Notes From Rich" e-mail to the agency. In June 2002, he will make a guest appearance in the final synchronous online session of "Taking Control of Your Career."

Even the Board of Directors is involved. They require a report every six months on the progress and results of the company's educational initiatives. "The Golin/Harris Report on Training and Development Activities" helps us track and evaluate our investment in our people, both as an organization and by location. Last year's year-end report showed that the offices that invested the most in training and development were also the most profitable," said CFO Stephen Russell.

Over the past few years, Golin/Harris has expanded its training and educational offerings. It offers classroom-based and self-directed learning opportunities onsite and programs that support learning and development outside the workplace. The Chicago-based corporate training team

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Rich Jernstedt, CEO, Golin/Harris International

sponsors agency-wide workshops on leadership, communication, and personal development, as well as programs relating to the company's organizational culture, mission, vision, and values. Each local office provides a customized curriculum of practical training workshops on topics such as writing, presentation skills, strategic planning, marketing, media relations, time management, interpersonal skills, computer skills, and stress management. Many programs are tailored to the company's market areas.

While the majority of Golin/Harris courses are classroom-based, the firm has recently launched several online learning opportunities that will account for about 10 percent of 2002 participant hours. These include publicly available tutorials, and the first of a series of customized blended learning solutions. The new online version of the popular Golin/Harris workshop "Taking Control of Your Career" was offered as a full-day classroom course in 2000 and 2001. It now combines self-study, "virtual" group study, and instructor-led teleconferences enabling Golin/Harris employees all over the world to participate. There are 25 students currently enrolled in the online version.

The training faculty includes company experts in specialized subject matters and outside training professionals to teach both

soft skills and practical skills workshops. All courses undergo a pilot phase for feedback and improvement before the final rollout. For employee convenience, training programs are offered at a variety of times and on different schedules.

To help orient new employees, the agency sponsors a "buddy system" that pairs new hires with more experienced staff for the first three months of their employment. Buddies introduce new employees around the office and "show us where to find important things such as the photocopier and coffee-maker," explained Carey Birdsong,

to share a confidential relationship with a seasoned professional and receive personalized career counseling. Last year in Chicago, more than 30 mentors and their protégés participated in the Golin/Harris Mentor kick-off breakfast.

Golin/Harris encourages all employees to pursue outside educational and developmental opportunities. The company provides tuition reimbursement of up to \$5,000 per employee per year, subsidizes professional association membership and conference participation, and encourages employees to build skills and develop new areas of expertise through community service.

Ten Chicago-based employees took advantage of the tuition program in 2001 and about 25 percent of all Golin/Harris employees are engaged in external training or formal education.

The company keeps employees informed about its training and development activities through an intranet site dedicated to workplace learning and a monthly e-newsletter that includes peer reviews of training sessions and profiles (including photos) of learners. "We find that this really helps to bring it home and makes it real and interesting for the participants," said one manager.

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

STRATEGY USED	PARTICIPANTS			
	Management/ Supervisors	Technical/ Professional	Frontline Workers	Part-time Workers
Tuition assistance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
On-site workshops and training	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Financial support for attending off-site classes, seminars, workshops and conferences	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Training/education on company time (on- or off-site)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Online learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Individual Development Plans linked to performance evaluations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Career counseling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Formal mentoring	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Job shadowing				

a new account executive. "It's nice to know there is someone you can call about where to find something or how to use the phone, and that you won't be bugging them. My buddy made me feel really welcome at Golin/Harris."

Employees may also participate in a mentoring program that enables employees

Developing Leaders at All Levels

The firm's flagship corporate training initiative is a leadership development program open to all employees. Launched in 2000, it is known as L2K2 (Leadership 2002). The program includes a series

of 10 full- and half-day workshops designed to foster visionary leadership, improve leadership skills and strategies, and encourage personal career development. L2K2 courses are organized into two areas. The Personal Career Development program is designed to help employees learn how to build rewarding, challenging, and exciting careers while creating a healthy balance among work, home, and community priorities. Courses in this area include:

- ◆ Coming up for Air: Finding Balance
- ◆ Finding your Passion
- ◆ Re-Launching Your Career through Entrepreneurial Leadership
- ◆ The Winning Edge

Learning to set goals is an important part of the Personal Career Development curriculum, and employees occasionally report back on their progress. During a Personal Career Development workshop, Account Executive Carrie Fischer set the goal of attending graduate school and mapped out a plan for achieving that goal. Less than a year later, she was accepted by Northwestern University's Master of Science in Integrated Marketing Communication program. Fischer said that the workshop gave her an opportunity to focus on her priorities. "I always knew graduate school was on the horizon, I just never mapped out how to get there. Sometimes we need a little encouragement to remember what those aspirations are. I'm looking forward to being a student again."

The Leadership Enhancement curriculum addresses foundational leadership skills based on seven Golin/Harris "core leadership competencies." These competencies are Building Trust, Building Successful Teams, Decision-Making, Building Positive Relationships, Communication, Managing the Job, and Creativity and Innovation. Courses in this curriculum include:

- ◆ Fundamentals of Innovation Acceleration
- ◆ Navigating Conflict and Embracing Change
- ◆ The Pros and Cons of Conflict
- ◆ Transformational Coaching

- ◆ Leading Intergenerational Teams
- ◆ World Vision: Navigating Culture for Global Business Success

Because leaders at different levels have different developmental needs, L2K2 courses are designed to fit job levels and functions within the agency, providing tailored instruction in essential career and leadership skills to account managers, senior account supervisors, administrative support staff, and others at all levels of the organization.

Another L2K2 program, "Leadership in Action," matches high-performing middle managers with selected community organizations to provide intensive, hands-on learning experiences. Offered in partnership with CUBIS Group, an innovative Chicago-based corporate training company, the program helps participants gain leadership, team building, and change-management expertise through directing organizational improvement projects at local nonprofit organizations.

The firm is in the process of planning the "Golin/Harris Women's Leadership Forum" to support the development of female leaders in the company and the industry.

Work/Life Balance

Golin/Harris offers a number of benefits intended to help employees pursue their personal development and avoid burnout by achieving a healthy balance between life and work. Along with competitive salaries and health benefits, the company provides fitness club reimbursement, financial assistance for adoptions, health care coverage for domestic partners, concierge and errand services, and a unique and highly regarded four-week paid sabbatical leave plan. One employee spent his sabbatical in Thailand writing brochures and video scripts for an orphanage south of Bangkok. "I gained a sense of perspective doing something for other people," he reported. "I felt refreshed and charged up when I came back to work."

Employees also have opportunities to contribute to their communities and pursue outside interests through a variety of volunteer and community service projects, supported by the annual Golin/Harris "Giving Back Award."

Golin/Harris believes these programs are key to the company's success in recruiting and retaining the best employees, because "there is more to life than just hard work." They also serve the company in another way. The public relations business depends on personal relationships, and strong personal relationships are built not only on business interests, but also on common outside interests, mutual respect, and trust. Golin/Harris wants its employees to be well rounded, community-oriented, and broadly educated individuals with a variety of interests outside of the office.

Assessing Effectiveness of Learning Activities

The firm measures the impact and outcomes of its development programs by reviewing a number of indicators.

- ♦ Business growth: "Have we expanded our work with current clients? Have we added new clients?"

- ♦ The number of employee promotions
- ♦ Employee exit interviews
- ♦ Client retention figures
- ♦ Employee turnover (Golin/Harris averages between 15 and 25 percent, well below the industry average.)
- ♦ Annual employee satisfaction surveys

Golin/Harris was recently recognized by Training magazine as one of the "Training Top 100" organizations for its outstanding employee development programs. In 2000, **Chicago** magazine ranked the firm as one of the "Best Places to Work in Chicago," based on a survey of employees measuring employee satisfaction, compensation, motivation, morale, and work/life balance. "We care about our employees as much as we care about our clients. Traditionally, PR firms focus almost exclusively on their clients," explained CEO Jernstedt, "We have made it a part of our business strategy to focus just as much on our employees."

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