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18. Totemic wins top award

Financial services

A problem shared is a problem halved at debt management firm Totemic and that applies to the company's attitude towards its staff as well as its clients. Each year the Grantham-based firm provides financial help to more than 100,000 people in debt and takes as much care looking after its employees as it does the wider community.

People feel managing director Philip Rann runs the organisation on sound moral principles, giving him a 76% positive score, and they have a great deal of faith in him (81%). People love to work for Totemic (also 81%).

"We make a difference," says Rann. "We have a lot of stressed clients and it isn't unusual for one of our people to save someone from suicide."

Employees feel the organisation is run on strong values, giving it a 76% positive score, believe they can make a valuable contribution to its success (78%) and would strongly recommend working for the organisation to others (83%).

Accounts manager Karena Brooks, who has been with the firm for eight years, had been unwell for years and eventually was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, a condition that affects the wall of the bowel and intestines.

"I was in and out of hospital, had two operations and was on medication that had serious side effects to the point that one day a colleague found me passed out in the toilet," she says. "The support I received from the management was second to none. They told me not to worry, that my job was always here and they valued me."

According to Lianne Tapson, human resources director, it is part of the firm's culture to be flexible and she says employees are regarded as being more important than profit.

"It's good to make a profit but not essential. We are not under pressure to make a profit, it isn't the most vital thing in our decision-making process," she says.

The workforce agrees, saying profit is not the only thing driving the organisation (71%). They believe managers care about them as individuals (79%) — just nine firms score higher.

That approach is not limited to the workplace. Last year the firm supported a charity called Help Lesotho and Totemic employees visited the African country to support the charity's work directly.

"Three of us went, with two staying in the main town to help out in the office, getting computers and practices up to scratch," says Nikki Carr, a case officer. "But I got the best bit. I went to an orphanage two hours' away and helped the nuns in their office and taught the children."

She proved a popular figure, having arrived laden with books, footballs and skipping ropes.

“They have nothing. Every morning they would draw into the dirt to play games such as hopscotch. They don’t have toys but they are so happy to share and play together. They are like children everywhere, they just want a cuddle,” she says.

“I’ve never had experience with charity work but, deep down, who doesn’t want to do their bit to change the world? I am so grateful to the company for giving me the opportunity.”

Employees say the firm makes a positive difference to the world, a 79% positive score, and are proud to work for the organisation (81%).

“Everybody gets treated the same, but every employee is treated like they are special,” says Brooks.