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GLOBAL AUTHORITY FOR WORKPLACE CULTURE



Top Employer

The Gold Standard for Workplace Excellence

Certification Criteria & Award Procedure
Applied Consistently Worldwide

Illustrative example for the years 2025/2026 and 2026/2027. The years shown are adjusted accordingly and serve only to illustrate the "Top Employer" award.

★ OVERVIEW

Summary

In times of increasing skills shortages, employers must compete more intensively for the best employees. Forward-looking TOP employers have to rise to this challenge in order to be recognized as such in the long term. For this reason, employers are well advised to have their qualities and points of attraction for employees measured regularly. Certification as a “Top Employer” is suitable for companies that want not only an employer seal and a marketing package, but also value feedback from their employees and wish to collect it through an independent employee survey.

Certification as a “Top Employer” consists of two building blocks used to assess attractiveness as a “Top Employer.” As part of a representative employee survey, all employees are invited to participate (with the exception of those who are, for example, on vacation or ill during the survey period). Employees are then given the opportunity to evaluate their employer comprehensively. Additional free-text fields allow them to submit suggestions for improvement, so that the employer receives comprehensive and anonymous feedback.

With the “Top Employer” award, employers benefit not only from an employer seal valid for 24 months and a marketing package, but also receive comprehensive employee feedback, enabling them to position themselves sustainably as an employer with a future.

To award the “Top Employer” employer seal, companies are assessed using a standardized procedure from the perspective of the employees (employee survey) and the perspective of the HR department (HR interview).

The following pages explain the “Top Employer” employer seal and the award procedure. The certification body decides on the award of a “Top Employer” distinction.

The employer seal and the certificate are each valid for two years (24 months). For recertification after 24 months, a new survey must be conducted in accordance with these specifications.

★ PART OF THE INTERNATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD NETWORK

These conditions apply uniformly to all “Top Employer” certifications that belong to the International Quality Standard Network ([quality-standard.com](https://www.quality-standard.com)). The criteria and the award procedure are consistent worldwide, ensuring comparability across all participating countries.

A separate, country-specific “Top Employer” seal is issued for each country. For example, it is awarded in the United States by USIQ ([usiq.org](https://www.usiq.org)) and in Germany by DIQP ([diqp.eu](https://www.diqp.eu)) — among other national partners of the network.

★ CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

Assessment Criteria for Awarding the Seal

These criteria for “Top Employer” certification are cross-industry in nature and define the requirements for corporate philosophy, management, employer quality, and workplace culture of companies seeking independent certification.

Among others, the certification addresses the following areas:

- Employee satisfaction
- Employee motivation
- Willingness to recommend
- Work organization
- Attractiveness as an employer
- Employee support
- Personnel development

★ COMPONENT 1 · WEIGHTED 50%

1. Employee Survey

As part of the certification as a “Top Employer,” a representative survey is first conducted among the employees. On this basis, employee satisfaction can be determined from the employees’ perspective. The written survey can be conducted online or offline.

Among other things, employees are asked about their overall satisfaction and their willingness to recommend the company as an employer.

The employee survey is weighted at 50% in the overall assessment.

1.1 Conditions of the Employee Survey

a) In principle, all employees working in the company, including trainees, must be invited to participate in the survey, provided they are present in the company during the survey period (i.e., not ill or, for example, on vacation). The survey period must be of an appropriate length to ensure a correspondingly high response rate.

As a rule, employee surveys have a response rate of approximately 50 to 70%. This depends heavily on company size and industry. In individual cases, this response rate may be significantly higher, but also significantly lower. In smaller companies, participation rates are often considerably higher than in large corporations. If considerable doubts arise due to an excessively low response rate, employees must be invited again (reminder) and the survey continued. Such an assessment is at the discretion of the certification body as a case-by-case decision.

b) Internally, the benefits of a survey — especially one conducted by an external provider — should be clearly communicated to employees. The wording should suit the organization; some examples are:

- Your opinion matters to us.
- You can make a difference; we take you seriously.
- You contribute to measures that lead to an improvement of the work situation.
- You can contribute to a wide range of important goals.
- You actively participate in a shaping process.
- An external survey provider guarantees anonymity and the confidential treatment of all statements.

Employees should be reminded that participation is voluntary and that honest answers are expressly desired. Any unjustified and manipulative influence on employees’ response behavior leads to termination of the survey and to denial of certification.

1.2 Assessment Standard for the Employee Survey

The employee survey is answered by means of quantitative data collection using Likert scales, as well as a free-response format (text field). A distinction is made between the questions required for certification (assessment-relevant questions) and the questions not relevant to the assessment.

1.3 Non-Assessment-Relevant Questions

The answers to non-assessment-relevant questions offer the opportunity to derive concrete actions and to optimize your quality as a top employer in the long term. These questions aim to obtain concrete feedback from employees for the employer.

They contain information for management and provide feedback on current offerings for balancing work and family life. Answers to these questions are of the utmost importance to your company, but are irrelevant for the assessment within the certification.

These questions may be changed after consultation with the certification body in order to address the specific needs of your organization. In addition to a single survey, a combined survey is also possible, conducting the survey together with the certification as a “Family-Friendly Employer.”

Sample Survey (Example)

The sample survey is an example and can be expanded if required, in order to adapt it to the individual needs of the employer. Unless stated otherwise, all statements are rated on the following six-point scale:

Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

Overall, I am satisfied with my employer.

Options: Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

Our company...

- can be recommended because of its products/services.
- has, in me, an employee who is proud to work here.
- uses feedback as motivation for improvement.
- offers sufficient and meaningful benefits.

WORKPLACE AND WORKING CONDITIONS

In our company...

- I am satisfied with my career and advancement opportunities.
- I can balance work and family life well.
- our working hours are flexible (possibly only when needed).
- I am adequately paid.
- performance and successes are recognized.
- I feel informed about the developments and strategic direction of the company.
- I feel encouraged to contribute my own ideas and suggestions for improvement.
- suggestions for improvement from employees are reviewed and implemented as far as possible.
- I am satisfied with the working conditions.
- feedback is desired and expressed regardless of hierarchy level.

Does something about/with your employer bother you?

- No, nothing bothers me.
- Yes, I would like... (open text)

Please think back to when you started your current position: your overall satisfaction with your employment compared to then has...

- Strongly increased
- Somewhat increased
- Remained the same
- Somewhat decreased
- Strongly decreased
- Do not know

WORK SITUATION

How do you rate the following statements?

- I have the latitude I need for my daily work.
- I would describe my work as varied and interesting.
- Employee performance is assessed regularly.
- I consider the performance assessment to be fair.
- I have the opportunity to make my own decisions regarding the execution of my work.
- The internal processes in our company are easy for me to understand.
- Work objectives are realistic and can be met.
- Overall, I am satisfied with my work.
- Information flows well within the team.

EDUCATION AND SHARING OF EXPERIENCE

How do you rate the following statements?

- I have the necessary knowledge for my daily work.
- Continuous training of employees is encouraged in our company.
- I have enough time to keep my work knowledge up to date.
- I receive sufficient support for new requirements in my work.

TEAMWORK / WORKING ATMOSPHERE

In our company...

- there is a positive working atmosphere.
- when mistakes are made, it is not about assigning blame; instead, solutions are sought.
- the competence of the individual counts, regardless of age, gender, or origin.
- personal initiative and responsibility are important.
- it is possible to talk openly about problems or problematic issues.

SUPERVISORS AND LEADERSHIP

Information flows well between employees and managers.

Options: Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

My direct supervisor(s)...

- says what they do and does what they say.
- is open to ideas and suggestions.
- encourages independent action and is able to motivate others to do the same.
- formulates clear, realistic goals and sets priorities.
- expresses appreciation for good work performance.
- accepts criticism of themselves.

OVERALL SATISFACTION

How do you rate the following statements?

- I would recommend our company as an employer.
- I enjoy working at our company.
- I am happy to commit myself to our company.
- If I had to decide again today, I would apply to our company again.

- I would like to continue working at our company in the future.

Have you already recommended your employer, or would you recommend your employer?

- Yes
- No

FAMILY FRIENDLINESS

The topic of family friendliness is important to our company.

Options: Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

Our company enables parents and/or employees with care responsibilities to balance work and family/care.

Options: Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

Overall, I am satisfied with the scope of the current offering for balancing work and family.

Options: Strongly agree · Agree · Somewhat agree · Agree less · Somewhat disagree · Strongly disagree

1.4 Assessment-Relevant Questions

The questions relevant to the assessment as a “Top Employer” relate to working conditions, the work situation, the working atmosphere, employee leadership, and employees’ satisfaction with the balance of work and family, as well as to the question of recommendation.

The content of these questions cannot be changed, as they ensure comparability. At the same time, there is of course the option to adapt these questions to the organization, as long as the meaning of the content is preserved.

Within the employee survey, a maximum of 100 points = 100% can be achieved. This value is rather theoretical, as in reality there will rarely be an employer that always achieves 100% in all areas.

The distribution of the 100 points among the assessment-relevant questions is carried out according to a standardized distribution key. The exact point distribution among the individual questions is not public. If it were published, it would potentially be possible for employers to influence the results to their advantage through targeted manipulation. The survey, however, should be free of manipulation attempts of this kind. The distribution is carried out in such a way that, in our view, the survey can optimally assess the qualities of a top employer.

A six-point scale from 1 to 6 is used for answering:

Strongly agree = 1 2 3 4 5 6 = Strongly disagree

1.4.1 Workplace and Working Conditions

- 1.4.1.1** In our company, I am satisfied with my career and advancement opportunities.
- 1.4.1.2** In our company, I can balance work and family well.
- 1.4.1.3** In our company, our working hours are flexible (possibly only when needed).
- 1.4.1.4** In our company, performance and successes are recognized.
- 1.4.1.5** In our company, suggestions for improvement from employees are reviewed and, where possible, implemented.
- 1.4.1.6** In our company, feedback is desired and expressed regardless of hierarchy level.

1.4.2 Work Situation

- 1.4.2.1** I have the latitude I need for my daily work.

1.4.2.2 Work objectives are realistic and can be met.

1.4.3 Education and Sharing of Experience

1.4.3.1 Continuous training of employees is encouraged in our company.

1.4.4 Teamwork / Working Atmosphere

1.4.4.1 There is a positive working atmosphere in our company.

1.4.5 Supervisors and Leadership

1.4.5.1 My direct supervisor is open to ideas and suggestions.

1.4.5.2 My direct supervisor formulates clear, realistic goals and sets priorities.

1.4.5.3 My direct supervisor expresses appreciation for good work performance.

1.4.6 Overall Satisfaction

1.4.6.1 Have you already recommended your employer, or would you recommend your employer? (Yes / No)

1.4.6.2 I enjoy working at our company.

1.4.6.3 I would like to continue working at our company in the future.

★ COMPONENT 2 · WEIGHTED 50%

2. HR Interview, Including Employer Benefits

As part of the audit, employer benefits are assessed. These include requirements for work processes and work organization, personnel development, employee leadership, family orientation, employer branding, and the company's separation and transition management.

Employer benefits are weighted at 50% in the overall assessment.

In the HR interview, a decision-maker from the HR department or from the management of the organization to be certified is usually interviewed. If, in exceptional cases, several people are interviewed, their responses are combined into an average result.

The aim of the HR interview is to capture, in addition to the opinions of the employees, the perspective (opinion) of the HR department. This is also a subjective perspective, which is supplemented by recording all objective benefits. Objective benefits are those that an employer offers its employees — for example, a company car, a transit pass, a childcare subsidy, or many other benefits.

The certification body evaluates the information and is entitled to request further evidence. In addition, the information is checked on a random basis against the results of the employee survey. If blatant contradictions arise, further evidence may be requested. In case of doubt, certification is denied.

The fulfillment of each requirement is rated with 1 to 5 points. A total of 100 points can be achieved in the HR interview, corresponding to 100%.

The information is evaluated by the certification body, and employer benefits are checked on a random basis. This may be done through internet research, document review, social media, or other methods. The specific assessment of each individual case is at the discretion of the certification body.

2.1 Work Processes and Organization

- 2.1.1** Work processes are precisely defined; responsibilities are determined, documented, and communicated.
- 2.1.2** Target agreements are made with employees according to the SMART rule: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.
- 2.1.3** There is a job description — tasks and activity profiles are documented and transparent.
- 2.1.4** Employees' scope of action is organized so that they can contribute daily to departmental and company success from their workplace.
- 2.1.5** There are consultations within the team or work areas on the status of projects and the culture of cooperation. This concerns the way people interact, securing the flow of information, and the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

2.2 Leadership and Vision

- 2.2.1** There is clear communication of the company's goals and their significance for the individual — the role of the employee in achieving goals is clearly defined and discussed; a clear goal-oriented culture prevails.
- 2.2.2** Employees know which contribution they can make — and actually do make — to company and departmental goals. Sustainable motivation is the result.
- 2.2.3** Individual successes are communicated and recognized.
- 2.2.4** Employees are involved in the development of changes, improvements, and processes.

- 2.2.5** Employees act in a coordinated manner, are involved, and are empowered to act independently.
- 2.2.6** Employee discussions are conducted in an open and confidential atmosphere and take the wishes and expectations of employees into account.
- 2.2.7** Employees are rewarded and recognized.
- 2.2.8** Employees are given responsibility — self-motivation is encouraged.

2.3 Personnel Development

- 2.3.1** The onboarding of new employees, or the integration of employees into a new field of tasks, follows defined processes; for example, there is an onboarding program.
- 2.3.2** Employees are supported through regular employee and feedback discussions. These include a targeted assessment of work performance as well as development planning.
- 2.3.3** Employee empowerment — employees are given room to develop, and independent action is encouraged as far as possible.
- 2.3.4** Opportunities for job rotation are offered.
- 2.3.5** Employees are supported and accompanied in their career planning.
- 2.3.6** For preparation for new tasks, there is needs planning as well as competence development.
- 2.3.7** Training, further-education, and continuing-education programs are offered and made possible for employees.
- 2.3.8** After further training, employees are given the opportunity to expand their tasks to a higher level of requirements.

2.4 Family Orientation

- 2.4.1** The company enables flexible working hours, which may include, for example:
 - Flextime
 - Home office
 - Job sharing — e.g., sharing one position between two employees
 - Part-time work where appropriately structured
 - Trust-based working time — no fixed working hours; instead, concrete goals and tasks to be fulfilled are defined.
- 2.4.2** It is possible, if necessary, to bring one's own children to the workplace.
- 2.4.3** Work-life balance and the reconciliation of work and family are integrated into HR discussions.
- 2.4.4** Employees with children are granted leave and vacation options, such as:
 - Sabbatical
 - Priority for parents in vacation planning
 - Working-time accounts
 - Flex days
- 2.4.5** The use of parental leave as well as the return to work are regulated. This is organized in the interest of the employees.
- 2.4.6** To facilitate the return to work, there are working-time models, e.g., temporary part-time work.

2.5 Employer Branding

- 2.5.1 Employer value proposition — as an employer, the company has defined its unique selling points, e.g., in compensation, advancement opportunities, the general work culture, the prevailing working climate, the work environment, and all other benefits that make the company attractive as an employer brand.
- 2.5.2 The advantages and special features of the company as an employer are communicated both externally and internally.
- 2.5.3 Positive candidate experience — covering all experiences of potential applicants. The company offers its applicants, for example: a user-friendly application process; reliable and fast feedback; and professional interviews.
- 2.5.4 Controlling — the company reviews its employer-branding measures and tracks KPIs, e.g.: rate of unsolicited applications; number of applicants per training position; rate of training dropouts.

2.6 Separation and Transition Management

- 2.6.1 The company has developed a fair separation culture — for this purpose, there are separation strategies and processes.
- 2.6.2 Departing employees are supported through outplacement or external placement.
- 2.6.3 Departing employees are temporarily released from duties to facilitate their job search.
- 2.6.4 Employees approaching retirement are offered options for partial retirement.

2.7 Fringe Benefits (FB) — Voluntary Additional Employer Benefits

- 2.7.1 Company pension scheme
- 2.7.2 Flexible working hours
- 2.7.3 Company kindergarten
- 2.7.4 Personal insurance
- 2.7.5 Company car
- 2.7.6 Further training
- 2.7.7 Additional vacation, e.g., for longer length of service
- 2.7.8 Childcare
- 2.7.9 Supplementary insurance
- 2.7.10 Meal vouchers
- 2.7.11 Travel-cost subsidies
- 2.7.12 Sports or leisure offerings
- 2.7.13 Extended continued pay in the event of illness
- 2.7.14 Health-insurance premiums
- 2.7.15 Capital-forming benefits
- 2.7.16 Life-insurance premiums
- 2.7.17 Health check
- 2.7.18 Employee shares/options
- 2.7.19 Discounts on the employer's products and services

2.7.20 Discounts on products and services from the employer's partners

2.7.21 Staff canteen with affordable meals and beverages

2.7.22 Newspaper and magazine subscription

2.7.23 Other benefits — please specify

2.8 Corporate Principles and Culture

2.8.1 Values are both the basis and a building block of behavior within the company. They are clearly defined, e.g.:

- lived values such as desired and required feedback regardless of hierarchy level
- criticism always paired with suggestions for improvement
- talking with one another rather than about one another
- recognition of successes and their announcement
- helping employees to be successful
- trust and cooperation

2.8.2 The defined values are known to all employees and are clearly communicated.

2.8.3 Our corporate culture is characterized by a culture of working together.

2.8.4 The defined values represent a natural component of how actions are governed — values are implemented readily and without hesitation.

2.8.5 The company regards diversity as a strength and creates a work environment in which the different talents in the workforce are recognized and encouraged — regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, worldview, or religion.

2.9 HR and Corporate Strategy

2.9.1 In HR management, there has been a paradigm shift toward appreciating employees, away from viewing personnel as a cost factor.

2.9.2 Within the company, HR management (personnel) has the same importance as, for example, sales or production.

2.9.3 Required and demanded employee competencies — social, leadership, methodological, and technical competencies — are specified in the corporate strategy, making use of the diversity within teams.

2.9.4 Communication structures exist that involve the entire workforce.

2.9.5 Employees are involved in the development and implementation of the corporate strategy; employees know their tasks and the company's goals. Employees take responsibility for all areas of the company.

2.9.6 Internal career and succession planning is aligned with the corporate strategy. For example, a competence model developed by management and the HR department allows talents to be assessed and strategically developed and promoted according to requirements.

2.9.7 Workforce reduction is always seen as a last resort; alternatives are considered first.

2.9.8 The company undertakes activities aimed at creating permanent, sustainable full-time jobs, e.g., by reducing overtime.

2.10 HR Management

2.10.1 Employee compensation is at least at the collectively agreed (tariff) level.

- 2.10.2** For performance-related additional compensation, there are fair and transparent compensation structures.
- 2.10.3** High performers and key competence holders are retained through measures (additional motivation, e.g., by creating freedom, assuming greater responsibility, varied recognition) or through horizontal or vertical career opportunities.
- 2.10.4** Employees share in the company's success.
- 2.10.5** An audit is conducted — investigation of issues (e.g., high absenteeism rates), risk assessment, and subsequent optimization.
- 2.10.6** Systematic and needs-based recruitment — transparent hiring criteria exist.
- 2.10.7** For the company, employees' work-life balance and life and career planning are of the utmost importance.
- 2.10.8** Recruitment always takes fairness and equal opportunity into account, regardless of gender, age, religion, and origin.

★ RESULTS & GRADES

3. Assessment Standard for Awarding the Seal: Top Employer

The “Top Employer” seal can be awarded in three grades: VERY GOOD, GOOD, and SATISFACTORY. As described, a total of 200 points can be achieved. The percentages refer to these theoretically achievable 200 points.

3.1 Very Good

The grade “very good” is awarded if a company has achieved at least 80% on the overall assessment matrix.

3.2 Good

The grade “good” is awarded if at least 71%, but at most 79.99%, has been achieved.

3.3 Satisfactory

The grade “satisfactory” is awarded if at least 61%, but at most 70.99%, has been achieved.

3.4 Denial of Certification

If the overall result is below 61%, the application for certification is rejected.

The use of this distinction is subject, among other things, to the applicable terms of use and the general terms and conditions of the certification body. Designations referring to persons apply to all genders unless otherwise indicated.