

# BOOK

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## BUSINESS



The **20**  
Best Book  
Publishing  
Companies  
to Work For



# Random House: The Best Book Publishing Company to Work For

There's no randomness to the world's largest trade book publishing company's high marks for professional and personal employee support.

# The **20 Best** Book Publishing Companies to Work For...



Random House employees (left to right)  
Hays Steilberg, vice president and director of Human Resources; Lisa Clark, manager, Human Resources; Dominique Cimina, associate publicist, Random House Children's Books; Robin Sutton, vice president; Emmanuel Brito, manager, Security Operations

# Random House

# ONLINE

There's no randomness to the world's largest trade book publishing company's high marks for professional and personal employee support.

By James Sturdivant

**I**f a formula exists for creating a great work environment, Random House Inc. seems to have found it.

The world's largest trade book publisher has created a structure that strikes a balance between employee support and autonomy, overall corporate vision and individual contributions. Along with a strong ethos of promoting wellness and a healthy work-life balance, the company has, according to its employees, managed to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship and collective responsibility—no mean feat for a book publishing group with a combined workforce of more than 3,000 supporting the publishing efforts of more than 120 separate U.S. imprints.

Fostering a great work environment is, without a doubt, something Random House Chairman and CEO Peter Olson takes seriously—even when he's dressed up in a bunny suit (don't worry, more on this later).

"We know we perform best as a company if our employees feel motivated, happy and committed," notes Edward Volini, deputy chairman and COO of Random House. "We particularly believe that people are more content and more effective at work if they are able to achieve a healthy balance between

time spent at work and time spent outside the office."

Employees benefit right off the bat from a generous vacation policy (new hires receive four weeks of vacation after their first year), with vacation time hitting six weeks after 25 years with the company. Random House's well-known sabbatical program offers all employees paid time off to pursue personal interests—four, five, six and seven consecutive weeks after 10, 20, 30 and 40 years of service, respectively.

"Knowing the huge demands made upon all of us by our daily workload, Random House actively encourages us to take real vacations regularly," says Andrew Van Der Laan, director, production planning, "and the sabbatical program offers an extended period for personal renewal and enrichment."

As would be expected, the company offers a good "classical" benefits program with extensive health coverage and retirement options, including a generous 401(k) match.

To encourage fitness, the company sponsors yoga and Pilates classes, and reimburses workers who join a fitness center or purchase health-related equipment, says Hays Steilberg, vice president and director of human resourc-

es. Employees can take advantage of in-house screenings for high cholesterol, hypertension and other conditions, a health risk-assessment program and an on-site health center staffed by a company nurse.

The interest in balancing life and work concerns is central to the company's management philosophy.

"A lot of executives rue the lack of a healthy life-work balance within their companies," notes Chip Gibson, president and publisher of Random House Children's Books. "[Peter] Olson is actually doing concrete things to make that balance better for his folks."

In addition to generous vacation time, the company provides four weeks of paid parental leave for new moms and dads. Back-up child- and elder-care services are available, as are on-site facilities for nursing mothers and free tutoring services for school-age children of employees. A matching gift program encourages involvement in charitable activities away from the office.

"I've worked at many of the other publishing houses in New York. Many of the company benefits which set Random House apart from its competitors are based on the belief that its employees are its most important assets," says Linda Palladino, director of children's production, Random House Children's Books.

### On-the-Job Benefits

When on the job, employees are empowered to take an active role in company operations and decision-making.

"We empower our managers and their staff with an enormous amount of independence in running their businesses," says Olson. "Our publishing divisions have broad autonomy for their creative, fiscal, operational and organizational decision-making toward meeting their challenging annual budget targets. Second-guessing our publishers and salespeople is not something we indulge in."

Such an approach "creates an environment committed to meeting the financial objectives of our collective businesses while concurrently honoring and celebrating the contribution of the individual," Gibson says.

Town hall-style meetings conducted by Olson allow the CEO to communicate the financial, strategic and publishing "big picture" while providing a forum for employee feedback. Olson also hosts a monthly New Hire Breakfast, where he encourages new employees to ask questions about the company.

The spirit of collaboration and open communication trickles down through the com-

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Edward Volini, Random House's deputy chairman and COO.

pany's management structure, according to Van Der Laan.

"Generally, employees at Random House trust and respect their management," he says, meaning they come to their supervisors to discuss work performance, personal matters and ideas for improvements, knowing that these will be considered seriously and kept confidential, if desired.

"Employees feel empowered at Random House primarily because they have the freedom to exercise immediate influence over the success of their business," Volini agrees. "A core principle of our operating philosophy is decentralization: Each of our six U.S. publishing divisions operates very independently with their own publishing programs, their own working style and their own individual character."

Random House publishers are able to make individual bids on new titles and "take an entrepreneurial approach," Steilberg points out. Olson, he says, strictly refrains from getting



Random House CEO Peter Olson welcomes Malika Green, granddaughter of Emily Brown (Corporate Reprints), to Take Our Children to Work Day in 2006.

involved in daily editorial and marketing decisions, believing "employees perform best when they are empowered to take responsibility for their work."

According to Van Der Laan, this level of autonomy "gives people the freedom to strive and create, while preserving the support mechanisms of a larger company."

While executives are given plenty of independence, Palladino notes, "Teamwork is encouraged; open communications are valued. The business runs with a most definite emphasis on collaboration. ... Our feedback is encouraged and often implemented."

Individual departments are encouraged to develop their own initiatives, events and traditions, ranging from "the seriously high-minded and idealistic to the very practical to nutty," Gibson says. Employees at Random House Children's Books, for instance, enjoy flex time, in-house author events, "supervisor feedback" weeks (when employees review their bosses), employee arts-and-crafts shows, ice cream socials—even cart races and beer pong.

"We believe in a healthy combination of work and play at Random House," Steilberg says. "Celebrations such as Dr. Seuss Day or Take Our Children to Work Day are immensely popular with employees."

At these events, employees and visitors are treated to fun activities around the office and night, without realizing it, get their picture taken with Olson—he has been invited to show up incognito, dressed as, for example, "The Cat in the Hat" or "Pat the Bunny."

Then there's the annual Children's Books Halloween party, described by Gibson as "an extravaganza of creative competitiveness, and a wonder to behold."

"We are also fond of group celebrations," he continues, "gala-themed events which often involve celebrity authors and illustrators ... past themes have included Mardi Gras, Chinese New Year, Groundhog Day, Preppy Drinking in the '80s, Lusty Pirates, King Kamehameha Day, Party Wars, on and on ..."

With such an emphasis on quality work and play, it may be hard to quibble with Olson's statement, "We want everyone to share our belief that if you want a career in trade book publishing, you want to work at Random House." **BB**

James Sturdivant is an award-winning freelance writer based in Philadelphia.