

# Trips, bonuses keep employees interested

By Tracy Turner

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Employees at Jonathan Barnes Architecture and Design need their passports when it's time to update their on-the-job training.

The Downtown firm offers its employees overseas fellowships

as a means for its architects to view "cutting-edge" designs and to gain stronger creative insight.

The trips, which began this year, also are the company's way of telling its workers, "job well done."

"The work we do here often requires researching designs from all around the world, so why not go and experience it in person?" asked owner Jonathan Barnes. "They come back with a richer understanding of how things are done in other places that they can use to benefit the client here."

The four-day trips, offered twice a year, are used to reward and recruit employees. The trips cost an average of \$2,500, a price Barnes calls a smart investment.

Workplace experts agree.

Bonuses and travel are a strong incentive that employers often use to attract and retain the best employees, said Steffanie Wilk, an Ohio State University professor of human resources in the Fisher College of Business.

Wilk said more employers have begun offering tailored work incentives to their employees as a means to remain aggressive in an increasingly competitive work environment.

The more unusual the bonus, the better the result for the employer, she said.

"A bonus is a one-time shot that employers use because they want to keep up with the competition by offering incentives that are valued by employees," Wilk said.

That's how the Client Satisfaction Reward program works at Exposites. The Columbus information-technology firm offers its 35 employees a yearend bonus based on scores they earn in monthly client-satisfaction surveys.

The bonus is a percentage of the employees' annual income and is "a sizable amount of money for many of them," said Alex Kirk, senior vice president of corporate development.

"We believe if you take care of people, you'll retain them as customers, so we view it as part of taking care of each other," Kirk said. "From the first day (a worker) starts here, they feel like they are vested in a company that takes care of its employees."

At Jonathan Barnes, the trips are to architecturally important locations in Europe or Latin America. The employee chooses the destination.

While there, employees spend their time researching and analyzing buildings and designs and are encouraged to meet with local architecture firms. Upon returning to Columbus, they give a presentation to their colleagues.

Sam Rosenthal chose Amsterdam.

While there, he studied current trends in Dutch housing design, including a jaunt to the "Living Tomorrow" house, a prototype of an automated futuristic house designed by Dutch architectural firm UNStudio.

The experience, Rosenthal said, was impressive.

"To be in that different environment inspired me," he said. "Now, it's about developing a way to incorporate what I learned and saw there into practice here."

Rosenthal said he appreciated the trip as a learning experience and an added bonus, noting that "it's a lot different from other places I've worked where the most employees got were a company-sponsored softball team and some pizza."

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