

Excellence: It Can Happen Anywhere

If you make your living talking about management and stuff, there are some things that really turn you on that are kind of weird. A couple of years ago, an issue of *Fortune* magazine arrived, and I looked at the cover and I started saying, “Yes! Yes! This is fantastic!” My wife thought I had absolutely lost it. Well, there’s a reason for it.

Fortune every year puts out this list of best companies to work for. And, typically, it’s the Googles or the Genentechs, and it’s rather predictable. Well, I think it was 2006, there was an unpredictable, ahead-of-the-fact winner. And the winner of best company to work for—for those of you who are not Americans, you will never have heard of them; for those of you who are Americans, most of you won’t have heard of them—is a Rochester, New York-based regional grocery chain called Wegmans.

I could go on and on and on about all the wonderful things Wegmans does for its people. But here’s why I loved it. I gave a speech somewhere, and I was talking about people practices, and, invariably, in question and answer sessions or people who come up during the break, they’ll say, “Yeah, Tom, well, you’re from Silicon Valley, you can do that stuff at Apple or Google or Sun Microsystems, but I’m in the service business.” And I thought, “God bless America. Anybody who hits me with that, ‘But I’m in the service business’ now, I can look them straight in the eye and say, ‘Then why is a regional grocery chain called Wegmans the best company to work for in the United States?’”

Which is to say, excellence in people practice is not associated with the price of your product. It is about excellence and people practice, and you can do it in groceries as well as in the wonderful, wacky world of Google.