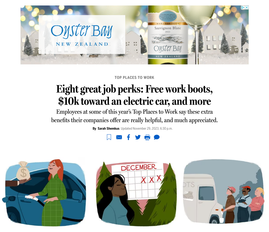
Shadia N. Brooks 11, 1st period

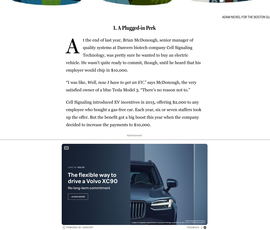


TOP PLACES TO WORK

Eight great job perks: Free work boots, $10k toward an electric car, and more

Employers at some of this year's top places to Work say these extra benefits their companies offer are really helpful, and much appreciated.

By Sarah Swenson Staff Reporter, The Boston Globe



ADAM NICKEL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

1. A Plugged-in Perk

At the end of last year, Patrick Kinninger, a senior manager of quality systems at Danvers biotech company Cell Signaling Technology, was pretty sure he wanted to buy an electric vehicle. He wasn't quite ready to trade in his gasoline-powered SUV for a new EV, though, until he heard that his employer would chip in \$10,000.

"I was like, *Well, now I have to get an EV*," says McDonough, the very satisfied owner of a blue Tesla Model 3. "There's no reason not to."

Cell Signaling launched EV incentives in 2015, offering \$2,000 to any employee who bought a gas-free car. Each year, six or seven staffers took up the offer. But the benefit got a big boost this year when the company decided to increase the payments to \$10,000.

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McDonough has never had much to charge his car at home — the company has also installed free charging stations at both of its locations.

The amped-up incentive is part of the company's strategy for achieving net-zero carbon emissions by its 30th anniversary, in 2030, and so far it is sparking a lot of interest in going green. The program hit its annual spending cap in July after an employee-wide task advantage — and there's already a waiting list for next year.

2. A Little Help Here

When the COVID pandemic arrived, leaders at the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center knew the staff of health care providers and support staff would be experiencing even more stress than usual. So, they took a few steps to prioritize the well-being of employees, working with Mavrix, a behavioral health service that provides telehealth counseling specifically tailored for workers in the health-care field.

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The result: Employees can use Mavrix to meet three times with a therapist. If they are pleased with the experience, they can continue their appointments — East Boston Neighborhood Health Center has increased that Mavrix will accept its health insurance. Before launching the program, the health center confirmed Mavrix had received Massachusetts-licensed therapists and that appointments would be quickly accessible.

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Employees are taking up the offer. Nearly 200 people have used the service for an average of 19 visits each, a number that chief behavioral officer Michael Mancuso says testifies to the impact the program is having. "It has had extraordinary benefits for our staff," he says.

Indeed, the organization is so encouraged, it is also looking at ways to offer employees similar access to other modalities such as reiki, yoga, and meditation, Mancuso says. "We're trying to think about the healing arts in a more comprehensive and holistic way."

3. Resting and Recharging

People who work at FamilyScan in Boston do so because of a passion for the mission: securing stable housing for families and preventing homelessness. The intensity of the work, though, can be emotionally depleting. And while the organization offers generous paid time off, employees are often reluctant to take it, says director of housing and prevention services Mikayla Francois.

The solution: Surprise self-care days. Twice a year, president and chief executive Lance Seymann will declare a day off, giving a couple weeks' notice. These days give employees a chance to do, well, nothing. Some essential front-line employees still work, but receive extra pay. "Being able to have that time to just reset and recharge is important," Francois says. "In order for our staff to be good for the families that we serve, they have to be good themselves."

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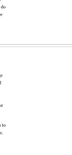
The last self-care day came on Monday, July 5, creating a four-day weekend. Francois used that day to spend some dedicated time with her 5-year-old son, playing games and hanging out in the backyard, without a work email in sight. "It's good for him to have my undivided attention," she says.

4. Get Paid to Learn a Language



ADAM NICKEL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Nichelle Gomez grew up speaking Spanish with her Puerto Rican parents. However, by the time she began her career as a social worker, she felt she had lost touch with the language, a gap that made it more difficult for her to work with the population served by her employer, Wayside Youth & Family Support Network in Framingham.

So, Gomez decided to take advantage of a perk offered by her employer: It came to spend on one-on-one language instruction through Preply, an online tutoring service. The organization began offering the benefit almost a year ago to give employees a chance to practice personalized tutoring on their own time with an instructor of their choice.

Gomez found a tutor who was able to help her regain her fluency and identify words specific to Puerto Rican Spanish that sparked fun when her countries might not understand. And the instruction is already yielding professional benefits: In October, she qualified as a bilingual clinician, earning her a pay bump and helping her make better connections with her clients.

5. Cashing in on Vacation

Newton hospice organization Good Shepherd Community Care offers generous paid leave: four weeks to start, rising to six weeks after five years. Yet managers leaders noticed many employees weren't taking full advantage of the benefits. So, in 2018, they added a new option: Employees who use only some of their leave can also choose to "cash out" part of it.

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This provision aims both to encourage employees to take time off, and to give them a little extra cash to spend on their vacations or household needs. "We want people to be able to take care of themselves and manage the stress of a difficult job," says Meredith Tansey, vice president of administration and human resources.

Per bereavement program supervisor Jaye O'Connell, the cash option has allowed her to better keep up with her five grown children as they have the need. She can use a day off and some extra pay to travel from her home in Northborough to visit her daughter at college in Boston. When her eldest son, who serves in the Marines, was injured last year, she used both the time and the money to fly to North Carolina to see him.

"I've been able to go places I haven't normally," O'Connell says. "The cash payout option is wonderful for me."

6. Volunteer Work

Last July, Darren Brown spent four straight days loading the renovation of the kitchen at the teen center in Weymouth. Brown, the head of marketing at Braintree footwear company OOFOS, coordinated the installation of new flooring and the hanging of shelves, but one thing he never had to do was check his work email. That's because OOFOS offers every employee the chance to take off an hours each year — with pay — to focus on volunteering without workplace distractions.

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"It's an opportunity for you to invest not only in your passions, but in people around you and in your community," Brown says.

The perk was introduced three years ago, and had been used for a range of causes such as giving blood, leading weekly Girl Scout meetings, and working with fostering-impaired children, says head of people Nicole Green. The company also organizes opportunities to use the volunteer time, such as making sandwiches for those in need and walking dogs for the local animal clinic.

For Brown, it is inspiring to see the results of his company's dedication to the community when he drives by the teen center on his daily commute. "Now as I am going to work every day," he says, "I get to feel the joy of knowing I left a permanent mark."

7. A Pajama Day for Grown Ups

ADAM NICKEL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

On August 16, BioProcure/Prendo customer service representative Lisa Tusinski picked out a very special outfit for work: Plush pink pants, a cozy pink T-shirt, and brown leather slippers with a faux shearling lining. "It was a full-on ensemble of complete pajamas," Tusinski says.

Tusinski's casual wardrobe choice that day was part of the biotech procurement company's third annual pajama day, a throwback to the days when getting to wear pajamas to school was the height of childhood excitement. To make the workplace fun, the company ordered a catered lunch of pancakes, French toast, scrambled eggs, bacon, and juice. "It's just a way to add a little bit of joy to the day," says Marie Lusk, vice president of human resources.

Tusinski, who had only been with the company a few months, was initially concerned that she might be one of the only employees in pajamas. But she needn't have worried. One co-worker wore a fleece onesie, while another sported a large bathrobe. Remote workers sent in photos of their pajamas get-ups to share in the action. Tusinski appreciated the widespread commitment and the company founders' willingness to do something a little silly to engage employees.

"They encourage and promote happiness within the company," she says.

8. These (Free) Boots Are Made for Working

The most popular attendance at RCL Mechanical's summer cookout this year wasn't the standard servings of barbecued meat or the raffle for Red Sox tickets — it was the truck stocked with all the latest work boots available from Red Wing Shoes, where each employee was given a credit worth up to $255.

"There were like 30 people in line," says Marc Mason, chief executive of the Raynham-based plumbing and heating company. "Everybody was loving it — we spent $15,000 or $16,000 on boots for everyone in the company."

The idea first came to Mason when an apprentice asked if the company offered a footwear allowance. Mason liked the idea, but wanted to do something more than just a reimbursement. There he learned that Red Wing offers a mobile shop, and he knew he had found his answer.

Lead residential plumber Austin Breland has worn Red Wing boots exclusively for about five years now and was delighted at the opportunity to get a new pair paid for by his employer (mostly: the top-tier boot Breland prefers ended up costing him $30 out-of-pocket).

"They bought me the exact boot that I've been wearing and loving for five years," Breland says. "It makes your job a lot easier when you're set up the right way, with the right equipment."

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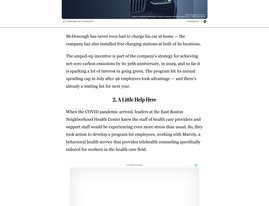

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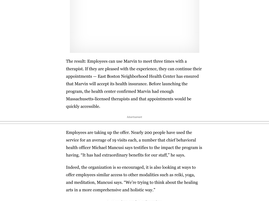

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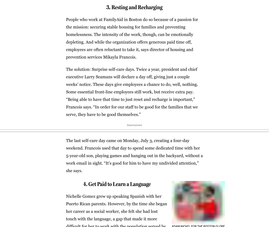

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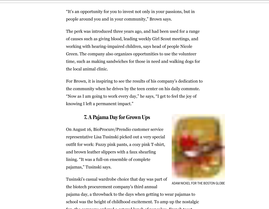

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