



2017 Award Recipient

Stellar Solutions

Stellar Solutions is a global provider of systems engineering, integration, and program management expertise in government and commercial programs related to the aerospace field. A woman-owned, professional engineering services business, with locations in Palo Alto, CA; Chantilly, VA; and Denver, CO, Stellar was founded in 1995 to provide technical expertise and management for national and international aerospace programs. The firm supports all phases of space systems development and operation, including for defense-related intelligence projects, international telecommunications programs, commercial imagery, and NASA's planetary and earth science missions. The company's vision, from its inception, is to align employees' dream jobs with customers' critical needs. Over 90 percent of the 175 employees work at secure/restricted customer sites.

Employees in Their Dream Jobs

- Part of Stellar Solutions' vision is for every employee to be in their dream jobs. New employees complete a new hire checklist and "dream job" worksheet within the first month of employment, check in with the respective sector vice president on their 30- and 90-day milestones, and meet face to face with the president/chief operating officer within the first quarter.
- To obtain external assessment and benchmarking data, Stellar began applying in 2012 to *Fortune* magazine's Great Places to Work small and medium-size business list and adopted the results of the top 95th percentile as benchmarks for its own employee survey data. Stellar has been named a Great Place to Work by *Fortune* magazine from 2014 to 2017. Among workforce climate measures, Stellar ranks above the 95th percentile compared to Great Place to Work benchmarks for satisfaction with benefits; employee perceptions that facilities are contributing to a good working environment; and employee perceptions of feeling physically, psychologically, and emotionally healthy at work.
- Relevant strategic action plans tied to employee incentive plans are reviewed by the employee and sector vice presidents, an approach that has increased workforce engagement and retention. Nearly 100 percent of the 150 engineering employee survey respondents agreed that they receive the right amount of management support, that management keeps them informed, and that management makes their expectations clear.
- Stellar's commitment to the workforce is demonstrated by extensive health and financial benefits in support of work-life balance, as well as 40 hours of professional development annually for all employees.
- Stellar Solutions' system of two-way communication throughout the company is focused on personal interaction with employees. Employees are motivated by annual, summer, and strategic plan all-hands meetings; town halls; surveys; and company-wide emails.



Highlights

- Stellar has been named a Great Place to Work by *Fortune* magazine from 2014 to 2017. Among workforce climate measures, Stellar ranks above the 95th percentile compared to Great Place to Work benchmarks for satisfaction with benefits; employee perceptions that facilities are contributing to a good working environment; and employee perceptions of feeling physically, psychologically, and emotionally healthy at work.
- Nearly 100 percent of the 150 engineering employee survey respondents agreed that they receive the right amount of management support, that management keeps them informed, and that management makes their expectations clear.
- From 2013 to 2016, 100 percent of customers surveyed said they would recommend the company to others. Stellar Solutions consistently has scored in the 4.7 range in ratings on its customer survey, in which 4 = Very Satisfied and 5 = Extremely Satisfied. 2017 surveys are currently being completed.
- Hoping to save lives by forecasting earthquakes, Stellar used its engineering expertise in 2000 to establish QuakeFinder, a human-machine interface and development program. The program has received significant investments since developed. The program is used to analyze electronic data and generate forecasts of seismic activity.



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- Sector vice presidents meet one-on-one with all employees every month seeking their input and insights on their customers, personal accomplishments, and well-being, and what would help them progress toward their dream jobs.
- A comprehensive, multiyear succession plan is in place for the chief executive officer and chief financial officer, as well as for the senior leaders of lines of business and business operations. The succession plan provides an assessment of the skill proficiencies and potential knowledge and experience gaps to be addressed by each possible successor.

Satisfying Customers' Critical Needs

- Voice-of-the-customer methods center on regular customer visits by senior leaders and directors. Customers are also surveyed annually, and resultant data are captured in a customer relationship management system.
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Helping Others

- In addition to its core services, the company is developing technology and methods for forecasting earthquakes, with the goal of creating a global warning system. Aiming to save lives, Stellar used its engineering expertise to create a humanitarian research and development program, QuakeFinder, in 2000 and has made significant investments since to build and deploy sensors designed to monitor electromagnetic precursors to earthquakes. Stellar and QuakeFinder monitor and analyze data from their deployed sensors in California, Peru, Chile, Greece, and Indonesia. In 2003, Stellar and QuakeFinder launched the first commercial triple cubosat, QuakeSat. (A cubosat is a type of miniaturized satellite for space research that is made up of multiples of 10×10×10 cm cubic units.)
- The Stellar Foundation contributes \$1,000 on behalf of each employee to the charity of his/her choice each year; 100 percent of Stellar employees take advantage of this program. Employees are also encouraged to get involved in their communities through a participation incentive in the organization's bonus plan.

Growing Revenue and Profitability

- Revenue has grown from a rate of 1.18 percent in 2013 to 6.81 percent in 2016. Such growth has occurred despite the constraints in government funding being identified as a key business challenge for the organization.
- Process improvements and cycle time reductions have led to Stellar Solutions' profitability growing consistently.

- The percentage of chargeable employees is consistently higher than 90 percent and exceeds the top 5 percent benchmark of Service Performance Insight, a global research, consulting, and training organization.

Crossing Boundaries to Collaborate

- All key stakeholders and employees are invited to contribute input for each strategic planning cycle through "Stellar All" emails and meetings. Senior leadership and off-site employees collect input from customers, partners, and the community throughout the year. Stellar's "crossing the boundaries" collaboration method facilitates leveraging the knowledge base of the entire company to identify potential new business as well as to deliver high impact for both current and future customers.

Monitoring What is Important to Us

- Stellar Solutions monitors all key work and support processes through a "what is important to us" criteria that include multiple metrics to measure the status of critical process goals. Each work and support process has a design template that also acts as a review scorecard.
- A fully operational IT disaster-recovery plan provides for continuity of operations in the event of a local emergency at any of the company's locations. The plan addresses firewall improvements, antivirus software, and robust password protocols to strengthen the company's cybersecurity position. A systematic eight-stage approach is used to design work processes. It begins with understanding stakeholder needs through voice-of-the-customer feedback and continues with best practices and defining metrics. After senior leadership approval, the process steps are created, employees are trained, and the process is deployed and monitored.

For more information:

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Baldrige Performance Excellence Program

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