Take This Job & Love it!

Big business isn't making friends with PWAS. But the positive policies at these 25 companies is help wanted.

January 1, 2000 By Grant Lukenbill

Is "AIDS-friendly corporation" an oxymoron? While the epidemic has left an indelible mark on everything from the arts to politics to sports, big business has stayed aloof—focused on lean-and-mean downsizing through the early '90s and, more recently, scooping up the fat profits of a booming economy.

A look inside the corporate office largely confirms this negligence. The majority of large companies still operate without policies and protections that support their HIV positive employees. Those that do offer comprehensive programs tend to be located in more liberal areas of the country such as the San Francisco metro region or within certain industries such as high-tech and computer software. Equally disheartening, the post-protease decline in public and private charitable giving to AIDS nonprofits can also be laid, at least partly, at the feet of the corporate world.

Still, many of the big-name companies that implemented PWA-friendly policies when the crisis was new continue to do the right thing in the workplace, the marketplace and the charitable-giving space. And plenty of small public and private companies have stepped up to help organize aggressive community coalitions, admirable education programs and advertising campaigns, and super-successful fundraising drives. Sadly, though, even many of these companies—including some with the highest AIDS profiles, such as Kenneth Cole—have balked at initiating extensive and far-reaching policies to benefit their employees with HIV.

So what defines a "PWA-friendly" company? At the very least, according to Ann Fisher, executive director of the AIDS Legal Council in Chicago, businesses should comply with the spirit and letter of federal laws like the Family and Medical Leave Act and provisions under the Occupation Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). (Protection for HIV positive employees under the mother of them all, the Americans With Disabilities Act [ADA], remains unclear, as the only Supreme Court ruling on that 1990 law, *Bragdon v. Abbott*, which was handed down in 1998, guaranteed ADA coverage to HIV positive women only.)

But to recast a company into a place that HIV positive applicants can approach with enthusiasm, executives need to go much further. In the early '90s, Lotus Corp. (now owned by IBM) distinguished itself as the first major company to publicize its decision to make domestic-partner

(DP) health-care benefits available. Since then, hundreds of employers have followed suit, including, most recently, United Airlines and American Airlines. Shelley Alpern, a senior research analyst at Trillium Asset Management, a Boston firm that specializes in socially responsible investing, says that the benefit policies at Lucent Technologies, IBM, Apple Computers, Walt Disney, Fannie Mae (the quasi-governmental home-mortgage agency), Ben & Jerry's and Levi Strauss are particularly noteworthy. "For our clients with HIV, DP benefits are a big issue, because they provide the care for the person who isn't able to work," Fisher says. "And I could tell you a lot of heartwarming cases where such policies really made a difference in workers' lives."

This sentiment is seconded by Alpern. "I can't overemphasize the importance of [DP] health benefits enough, since AIDS is such an expensive disease," she says, adding that "a company seeking to offer more support and compassion [should] also offer dental benefits for one's partner, offer bereavement leave and extend its family medical-leave policy to gay people with ailing partners." Although substantial progress has been achieved in the past decade, today fewer than 100 of the Fortune 500 companies offer DP health coverage or comprehensive HIV-education programs for all employees.

Fisher outlined the five criteria—beyond DP benefits—that meet her definition of a "PWA-friendly" company:
1. Access to good health insurance, including both long- and short-term disability coverage, a good prescription payment plan and, ideally, the opportunity for employees to choose from a variety of plans.
2. Sound, extensive policies on accommodating employees with HIV, including flexible working schedules and telecommuting options.
3. Respect for confidentiality concerns.
4. Zero tolerance for harassment in the workplace.
5. Sensitivity training about HIV issues for all managers, with basic education about universal precautions for both care and prevention.

Of course, verifying Fisher's criteria with companies is tricky because many firms don't advertise such benefits—they are often still grappling with how best to position their policies. Should they be touted and used as a recruitment tool? If so, are they inviting a competitive war for talent within their industry? Such concerns—as well as opposition from PWA-unfriendly executives and investors—mean that few companies want to fully detail the extent of their HIV-sensitivity or diversity-training programs.

Merely having progressive policies on the books does not guarantee that a company will *act* progressively on HIV-related conflicts and complaints, but it does provide a legal underpinning for redress should an employee be mistreated as a result of his or her serostatus. Rick Williams, PhD, the global program manager at Polaroid Corp., calls for companies to even refrain from lumping AIDS-sensitivity training in with general diversity programs. He argues that HIV issues are less likely to be taken seriously if they are simply footnoted in a larger initiative, and urges highlighting the subject and elevating the discussion within the organization. Not one of the big three car makers—General Motors, Ford and DaimlerChrysler, each among the country's largest

employers—offers PWA-friendly benefits, nor have most major manufacturers of anti-HIV meds. So a researcher who helped develop Fortovase at Hoffmann-LaRoche, Viramune at Roxane Laboratories or Crixivan at Merck & Co. would have been—and would still be now, several years later—prohibited from putting his or her domestic partner on the company's health-insurance plan to cover the cost of that drug.

AIDS policy is an area that the nation's business press also tends to avoid. Last July, a *Fortune* cover story on diversity omitted any reference to HIV-sensitivity training, and ignored DP health insurance as a defining issue for diversity-conscious companies. An article in the same issue hinted that Silicon Valley high-tech culture was bigoted (at worst) or asleep at the switch (at best) on diversity. Yet nearly every major U.S. high-tech company offers DP insurance, and the industry is widely known as the first to promote gender and sexual-orientation diversity.

Sharon Parker, president of the American Institute for Managing Diversity, says that firms approach the subject in one of two ways. "Some understand that diversity is critical to their business," she says. "Then there's the old way, where the company looks at diversity as something that they've been mandated to do—usually by the government—in relation to affirmative action."

Firms that make the leap into comprehensive diversity are likely to reap rich rewards: According to a report from the Society of Human Resource Management, DP health-care benefits are now the number one recruiting tool in corporate America. Liz Winfield, president of Common Ground, a Denver-based consulting firm that specializes in sexual-orientation issues in the workplace, contends that such benefits have replaced 401(k) pension plans and even stock options as a job-seeker's top attraction. "This is an important trend that will continue," she says. "I think we'll see it drive benefit plans toward being more inclusive on all issues, for all employees, straight and gay."

Even with a company's implicit support via progressive HIV policies, it's not always clear whether an employee should be open about his or her HIV status. Charles Kelly, a placement manager at Mobilizing Talents and Skills (MTS), a New York City employment agency that specializes in HIV positive workers, advises against disclosure, arguing that the threat of discrimination can never be erased by a written policy. "Of course, disclosure has to be handled on an individual basis," he says, "and we do provide people with information on the pros and cons. But in general, I don't think there is any reason for an employer to know your status if you're capable of doing your job."

At least some HIV positive workers believe the opposite—that only by being open will discrimination end and other employees become more enlightened. Bob Baublitz, a manager at Bell Atlantic, says, "I think it's important that the people you work for know your situation. Every person adds something when willing to tell the truth." Baublitz acknowledges that it's relatively easy for him because he has a great deal of support from his company. For others, though, the corporate office shows an unfriendly face or worse. The fact remains that big business just doesn't get it: The minimal financial costs of making the workplace welcoming to HIVers are far outweighed by the benefits—in consumer goodwill and employee morale, just to name a

couple—that come from doing the right thing.

25 FOR 9-TO-5 HIVers

The following brand-name companies have above-average track records supporting employees with HIV as well as those otherwise affected by the disease. Welcome to the winner's circle—it's small but select. The entry requirements:

Access to good employee insurance, including domestic-partner (DP) health-care coverage. All the companies on the list offer such coverage to gay and lesbian partners (although at press time Naya had yet to confirm that it offered them to its U.S. as well as its Canadian employees); not all, however, offer DP coverage to unmarried heterosexuals.

A nondiscrimination and action plan supporting the needs and confidentiality of employees living with HIV.

A manager or work-group committee in charge of addressing HIV issues, sensitivity and conflict resolution.

A strong track record in recent years recruiting, employing and promoting women and minorities.

A documented history of charitable giving to AIDS organizations.

The list was deliberately narrowed to include companies with national name recognition that employ large numbers of people—particularly minorities. It was compiled following consultations with officials at AIDS organizations and other consumer-advocacy groups. The list purposefully focuses on HIV-related issues only; some of the companies may therefore have less-than-progressive policies on other issues such as labor rights and the environment. The companies below are listed alphabetically, not in ranking order. —GL

American Airlines, Inc.

Despite any lingering misconceptions, American Airlines has turned itself around. But it took a number of incidents—including the forced removal of a passenger with AIDS—to jolt the airline. Another particularly embarrassing incident occurred just prior to the 1993 March on Washington for gay rights, when AIDSphobic American Air flight attendants had the linens changed on the seats immediately after a flight to DC comprised largely of gay travelers.

American admitted to its employees' mistakes soon after, and took aggressive, proactive measures to correct the problems. That same year, American was the first major airline to implement a sexual-orientation nondiscrimination policy. American offers DP health-care insurance to employees, but did wait until United Airlines offered them first—United's belated offer came at the end of a long legal battle with the city of San Francisco over a municipal ordinance mandating that companies conducting business with the city offer DP benefits.

P.O. Box 619616, Fort Worth, TX 75261-9616; 800.433.7300 www.aa.com

American Express Co.

American Express employs about 70,000 people in a variety of areas, not just financial services. It is one of the world's largest travel agencies, and it publishes a variety of travel-related magazines, including *Food & Wine*, *Departures* and *Travel & Leisure*.

Leila Erlandson, manager of public affairs at American Express, says that the late Bob Ahlcrona, a team leader in customer-service operations, "was one of our most admired employees, and when he became sick with AIDS, the company was very supportive of him."

Tower C, 3 World Financial Center, 200 Vesey Street, New York, NY 10285; 800.528.4800 www.americanexpress.com

Bank of America Corp.

Bank of America, the nation's second-largest bank, employs 93,000 people and provides financial services nationwide and in 42 countries. According to West Coast AIDS organizations and community leaders, the firm has an especially good scorecard on AIDS-related philanthropy.

100 North Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC 28255; 415.622.3456 www.bankofamerica.com

Bell Atlantic Corp.

When Bell Atlantic merged with Nynex in 1997, it became one of the largest local telephone conglomerates in the nation, serving nearly 30 million customers in 13 states. Many insiders at the company say the giant firm is run by "a bunch of good guys," including Ray Smith, who testified in 1997 before the Department of Labor in support of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA), the federal bill that was eventually rejected by the Senate.

Alex Bonet, 44, an HIV positive systems analyst at Bell Atlantic since 1982, told *POZ* that when he was out on disability in 1996 for 11 months, the company was exceptionally helpful in every aspect. "They've been very good, the way they treated me…not overwhelming me with work…understanding when I needed shorter days. I was also set up to work at home."

1095 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036; 212.395.2121 www.bellatlantic.com

Ben & Jerry's Homemade, Inc.

The company that launched the premium ice-cream craze has, despite its critics' complaints about a culture as nutty as some of its flavors, become a mainstream success. Long lauded for its

outsized contributions to liberal causes, Ben & Jerry's gives a sizable proportion of its profits (nearly 8 percent) to charity.

30 Community Drive, South Burlington, VT 05403; 802.651.9600
www.benjerry.com

Charles Schwab & Co., Inc.

Schwab is the nation's leader in discount brokerage services. It was one of the first such companies to offer DP coverage to employees, starting in 1993.

101 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, CA 94104; 415.627.7000 www.schwab.com

Chase Manhattan Corp.

Now the largest bank in the United States in terms of assets, Chase recently extended DP health-care coverage.

270 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017; 800.CHASE24; www.chase.com

Coors Brewing Co.

Coors is always brewing controversy. On the one hand, the company is now supportive of its employees living with HIV and also provides DP health care insurance, which its beer-industry competitors do not. Coors also markets its products directly to many minority consumers and is a prominent sponsor of some gay and lesbian community events.

On the other hand, the Coors family, which owns the majority of the company's stock, has long been associated with right-wing organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Foundation, which have abysmal records on a number of human rights issues related to people living with HIV.

311 10th Street, Golden, CO 80401; 800.642.6116; www.coorsjobs.com

Eastman Kodak Co.

Eastman Kodak has one of the most comprehensive workplace AIDS-education efforts in the country, and its VP of Human Resources, Mike Morley, testified in support of ENDA before a Senate committee in 1996. Kodak maintains an Education and Development Center which provides a four-hour class for employees entitled "Sexual Orientation Issues in the Workplace."

343 State Street, Rochester, NY 14650; 800.242.2424; www.kodak.com

Gap, Inc.

More than 70,000 people work for Gap, which exploded into one of the country's top casual retailers over the past couple of decades; its stores include Banana Republic and Old Navy. The company is widely known for workplace-based programs, volunteerism and charitable giving related to HIV and AIDS.

The Gap has been the grand sponsor of San Francisco's annual AIDS Walk for several years. In the past decade, the Gap Foundation has also given more than $1.4 million to AIDS service organizations.

One Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94105; 800.427.7895 www.gap.com.

Glaxo Wellcome Inc.

Glaxo Wellcome was the first drug company to offer DP health-care benefits and is still one of the few to do so today.

Glaxo has long been in the AIDS spotlight as the maker of AZT, the first approved anti-HIV med. In 1989, when the company was known as Burroughs Wellcome, AIDS activists broke into the company's offices; they were dragged out by police, but attention was drawn to allegations that the company was price-gouging on AZT. Since then, however, the company has become progressive on many issues—although not necessarily on drug pricing.

P.O. Box 13398, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709; 888.TALK2GW www.glaxowellcome.com

IBM Corp.

IBM—one of the bluest blue chips of them all—has bounced back in the past few years to take a leading role in information technology. It only recently offered DP health-care coverage to its gay and lesbian employees, but IBM was one of the first major corporations to install a written nondiscrimination-policy statement regarding sexual orientation—in the '70s. Over the past decade, the company has contributed more than $1.3 billion to nonprofit organizations and schools.

New Orchard Road, Armonk, NY 10504; 800.426.4968; www.ibm.com

Levi Strauss & Co.

Jeans popularizer Levi Strauss, a privately held firm with some 30,000 employees, is not shy about its AIDS-outreach efforts or its gay-oriented advertising. Its executives were among the first in the corporate world to speak out about the AIDS epidemic.

1155 Battery Street, San Francisco, CA 94111; 800.872.5384 www.levistrauss.com

The Limited, Inc.

The Limited, which employs some 130,000 people, operates 5,300
specialty stores nationwide such as Victoria's Secret, Lane Bryant and Henri Bendel. The company extended full DP health-care benefits effective April 1999. The Limited also extended adoption-assistance benefits to all employees, gay or straight, single or partnered.

3 Limited Parkway, Columbus, Ohio 43230; 800.945-9000
www.limited.com

Liz Claiborne Inc.

Retailer Liz Claiborne employs more than 7,000 people and sells everything from shoes to home furnishings. Long a supporter of women's issues, the company has also made AIDS a priority in its diversity training.

2 Claiborne Avenue, North Bergen, NJ 07047; 800.578.7070
www.lizclaiborne.com

Lucent Technologies

Approximately 153,000 people work at Lucent, which was part of AT&T before the corporation split into three separate companies. A leader in computer and business communications and switching and digital processing systems, it is also a company with strong diversity outreach.

After splitting from AT&T, Lucent almost immediately began offering DP health-care benefits. It also became one of the first large companies to specifically incorporate language in its nondiscrimination-policy statement protecting transgendered employees.

600 Mountain Avenue, Murray Hill, NJ 07974; 908.582.8500; www.lucent.com

MCA/Universal

About 15,000 people work full-time at Universal Studios, which produces and distributes motion pictures, TV shows and videos. Seagram Co., which has an excellent record on AIDS education, community funding and outreach as well as gay and lesbian workplace policy, owns a controlling portion of MCA's stock.

100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608; 818.777.1000; www.mca.com

Naya Inc.

Bottled-water seller Naya has sponsored numerous AIDS-related causes and events and has long been a favorite among minorities—particularly gays and lesbians.

1200 High Ridge Road, Stamford, CT 06905; 800.268.6292; www.naya.com

New York Times Co.

The publisher of the country's most influential newspaper also maintains business interests in a variety of news- and entertainment-oriented environments, including magazine publishing, television broadcasting and wire services, employing some 13,200 people overall.

229 West 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036; 800.448.4637; www.nyt.com

Polaroid Corp.

Polaroid has nearly 10,000 employees and sells cameras around the world. The company's record on AIDS education and leadership in the workplace is exemplary.

784 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, MA 02139; 800.343.5000
www.polaroid.com

Quark, Inc.

Quark, founded in 1981 by Tim Gill, makes highly popular software programs for graphic designers. The company is widely known in Colorado for generous corporate giving to AIDS-related causes. Gill says: "I lost one of my very first employees to AIDS. He was also my college roommate. I was giving money to AIDS before then but now I donate much more. His death got me a lot more involved."

1800 Grant Street, Denver, CO 80203; 800.676.4575; www.quark.com

Starbucks Corp.

A company that came from nowhere in the '90s, Starbucks is now everywhere, operating more than 2,000 coffee outlets and cafes across the United States. The company has made significant contributions to children's groups and AIDS housing organizations.

2401 Utah Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98124; 800.344.1575 www.starbucks.com

Time Warner Inc.

Time Warner's most well-known
property is *Time* magazine, whose 75th anniversary issue, published in 1998, did not contain a single reference to AIDS. Thankfully, such oversights are not routine at Time Warner—its workplace policies covering all 68,000 employees are exceptionally progressive.

75 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10019; 212.484.8000; www.time.com

UnumProvident Corp.

Unum is one of the biggest corporate players in long-term disability insurance. The company's newsletter regularly discusses treatment and education issues related to HIV, and the firm even developed an HIV-awareness book for children. Unum has been a sponsor of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt and consistently encourages employees to volunteer for HIV-related service programs.

2211 Congress St., Portland, ME 04122; 207-575-2211
www.unum.com

The Walt Disney Co.

Disney owns a wide range of interests, including the ABC television network, theme parks and a huge movie division, employing a total of 110,000 people. Although it was the last of the big media conglomerates to offer DP
benefits to employees, the company's political support and community outreach on AIDS-related issues has been solid.

500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521; 818.560.1000
www.disney.go.com

CORPORATE ATTENTION DEFICITS?

Most of corporate America still refuses to offer domestic-partner health-care coverage, likely the most important marker of a PWA-friendly firm. While POZ readers might expect to find the big three car manufacturers—**General Motors**, **Ford** and **DaimlerChrysler**—in this rogue's gallery, the presence of another big three—AIDS drug makers **Hoffman-LaRoche**, **Merck & Co.** and **Roxanne Laboratories**—might be a nasty surprise. *POZ* isn't crying boycott, but since many HIVers-on-the-go can't be without pills and wheels, you should know that these 15 companies are less-than-exemplary bosses to PWAs.

Continental Airlines
Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores
Darden Restaurants
Eli Lilly and Co.
Exxon Corp.
Gillette Co.
General Electric Co.
Kmart Corp.
Mutual of Omaha
Nestle S.A.
Philip Morris, Inc.
Procter & Gamble
Unilever

Wal-Mart Stores Inc.
Wendy’s

NOTE: Of the firms listed above, General Electric and Exxon have steadfastly refused to implement written nondiscrimination-policy statements on sexual orientation, a problem still unresolved despite recent resolutions brought forward to senior management by shareholders of the companies’ stock. Darden Restaurants and Chrysler claim to have recently implemented such policies, but sources say that Chrysler’s policy has yet to be officially posted on the production line, and that Darden has not included the information in its most recent employee handbook. As you might imagine, not having such a policy means that a company is less progressive in nearly all other areas, including HIV policy.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Take-This-Job-Love-it-10605-9261