



NO. 1 – 101 TO 350 EMPLOYEES

Extreme Pizza: Casual openness is a way of doing business

BY VERA H-C CHAN
 sanfrancisco@bizjournals.com

All the pizza you can eat. End of story. Well, all right, that might be enough of a bonus to satisfy a ravenous teenager. But as you get a little older, a worker needs more than the promise of eternal pepperoni.

The corporate office of San Francisco-based Extreme Pizza, throws in medical benefits, generous time-off policies and a freestyle atmosphere of a neighborhood pizza joint — with just enough drive to operate an empire of dough bringing annual revenue totaling \$10 million.

Casual defines the bare-bones corporate office, across the street from its Folsom Street pizza location. Décor consists of second-hand furniture, sporting equipment and framed articles about Extreme Pizza's success, based on founder Todd Parent's recipe of a healthy gourmet approach, savvy name branding through sponsoring the X Games and creating Extreme Golf, and its motto, Life Is Too Short for Mediocrity.

"There are absolutely no walls or cubicles," said Suzanne Dunbar, vice president of human resources. "It's just one big room, and our desks are right next to each other. It's an open environment."

The openness contributes to the exchange of ideas, and occasionally duties. The corporate staff of nine has their specialties, although their business cards don't have titles.



ON STRIKE: Suzanne Dunbar gets ready to roll one during a bowling session with Extreme Pizza staff.

EXTREME: Familiarity is vital, but has limits — 'We understand that people have a life outside Extreme Pizza'

With the exception of the newly hired in-house attorney, every staffer can sub for one another. The flexibility works well when people take off for anything from family leaves to touring with the band.

"We understand that people have a life outside Extreme Pizza," Dunbar said. "We've all known each other for so long, we're friends. We're family at this point." Probably better, since even kinfolk need to retreat behind walls once in a while. These folks lunch together, celebrate Yuletide with local retail managers at Ella's and compete in the retail vs. corporate softball game. Last year, corporate staff and their families celebrated Extreme Pizza's 10th anniversary with a week in Maui.

Familiarity is fostered at Extreme Pizza's four store locations, and to some extent even at its 18 franchises: Would-be Extreme Pizza owners fly in for an intense month-long training in San Francisco, an experience that creates a lasting relationship. Corporate staff visits all the directly owned eateries regularly (two to three more are on the way), and Tuesdays are spent meeting with all managers.

While all full-time employees are entitled to a health plan, part-timers, too, profit in performance-based bonuses, whether tied to sales or customer service. For instance, in the cashier incentive program, undercover phone calls check to see if cashiers are delivering the right attitude and information. If they're caught doing good, they get a bonus for themselves and everyone else



MORALE TO SPARE: Extreme Pizza employees take time out at the bowling alley to relax and have fun together.

on that shift.

More importantly, they're also encouraged to speak to managers or directly to corporate to recommend changes, whether about re-evaluating delivery areas or wrapping sandwiches properly. About 75 percent of all Bay Area staff — whether managers or drivers — have

been with Extreme Pizza for more than a year, a high number in a business known for high turnover.

Naturally, everyone gets free food during their shift, and half-price at other times. Oddly enough, there has never been a pizza-eating contest — although that may change.

"Two employees actually got into an argument who was the better pizza maker. It actually got heated," Dunbar recalled. "We were thinking of having a competition."

Vera H-C Chan is a contributor to the San Francisco Business Times. ■

Best Places to Work (101-350 Bay Area Employees)

Rank	Company Address Phone Web site	Score	Bay area employees	Established	Business	Top Bay Area HR executive/ Title	Top Bay Area executive/ Title
1	Extreme Pizza 1052 Folsom St., San Francisco 94103 (415) 703-8122 www.extremepizza.com	95.46	173	1994	Pizza restaurants	Suzanne Dunbar, Vice president	Todd Parent, CEO