



# OREGON SPICE

PREMIER EMPLOYER  
PROJECT  
Fall 2012

Funded by  
THE **HITACHI**  
FOUNDATION



**FOUNDED**  
1980

**LOCATION**  
Portland, Oregon

**EMPLOYEES**

- 48 full-time employees
- 10 average years of employment

**PRODUCTS**  
Herbs and Spices

**WEBSITE**  
[www.oregonspice.com](http://www.oregonspice.com)

**"FROM THE BEGINNING, I HAVE KNOWN THAT IF I ASKED A QUESTION, MY EMPLOYEES WOULD KNOW THE ANSWERS."**

**—PATTY BODAY, PRESIDENT**

## INTRODUCTION

When President Patty Boday and her father, Larry Black, acquired Oregon Spice in 1998 they saw an opportunity to create a family-like culture that her father had created in his previous company. With a fresh perspective and approach to steady customer growth, she implemented best practices over the next decade, striving to avoid the common pitfalls and mistakes of a high growth company.

Patty and her management team strive to build a strong company culture based on a commitment to deep listening, curiosity and modeling behavior that represents mutual respect *across the entire company*.

## PRACTICES AT A GLANCE

### TRAINING AND MENTORING

Oregon Spice focuses on training and mentoring to ensure all employees that handle spice understand its intricacies and nuances.

### PROMOTING FROM WITHIN

Whenever possible Oregon Spice fills open positions with internal candidates.

### OPEN DOOR POLICY

Oregon Spice's open door policy keeps communication open and transparent between managers and employees.

### EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

Oregon Spice looks for unique and authentic ways to appreciate employee contributions to its success.

## RESULTS

Revenue has increased ten-fold since Patty came on board and the company has been resilient during the down economy. The company boasts a turnover rate of less than 5% across the organization. Approximately 80% of supervisors and managers have been promoted from within. Employees feel they are co-creating the business with the management team.

## EMPLOYEE PRACTICES

### TRAINING AND MENTORING

Spice is a volatile product. The region in which it's grown and the growing season impact its quality as does it the way in which spice is processed, stored and handled. All products are approved by the Quality Assurance Department before they are moved into the warehouse. In the unlikely event that bad product has passed the QA tests, employees must have the skills to detect product that does not meet quality standards before it is accepted into the warehouse. Oregon Spice ensures employees have these skills by providing ongoing training and mentoring for its employees.

**"I ENJOY EMPOWERING MY TEAM TO DO THEIR JOBS WELL. I BELIEVE IN SHARING EXPERIENCES SO EVERYONE LEARNS."**

**— FERNANDO, BLEND MANAGER**

**EMPLOYEE STORY: FERNANDO, BLEND MANAGER**

In 1999 Fernando was recruited from another spice company to repack spices part-time. Due to his skills and experience, he was soon offered a full-time position blending spices. From there he was promoted to a blend manager.



Today, Fernando is the Blend Manager, a critical job in this company. Two supervisors report to him and his responsibilities include training new employees and providing ongoing training and coaching to existing employees in his department. He says keeping up with high productivity demands can be challenging.

Fernando attributes much of his success to the ongoing training and mentoring he has received as an employee. What he most appreciates about Oregon Spice is its culture of helping each other out. When demand /output is high for his department, he can count on other departments to help them out and vice-versa.

**PROMOTING FROM WITHIN**

Given the nuances and complexities of spice, key positions are filled with internal candidates when possible as existing employees are familiar with products and processes, requiring less training and onboarding time.

Open positions are posted on a public bulletin board for employees. A small selection committee interviews all candidates. If not selected, internal candidates are given feedback about opportunities for improvement and may be assigned a mentor. Management has found that the process builds employee's skills while also benefitting the company.

**CULTIVATING MANAGERS**

Maintaining an internal pipeline of qualified managers requires ongoing training, mentoring and coaching. Oregon Spice is sending its entire management team to the Master Graduate Leadership program offered by Discover Leadership in Houston, Texas. The program helps individuals break through personal barriers, gain focus and build greater self-confidence to improve both their personal and professional lives. As a team, managers are committed to living with a positive attitude, focusing on outcomes and holding each other accountable to the principles of Oregon

Spice. To date, five managers have attended and the company says it plans to send two more managers in 2013.

**"OREGON SPICE IS A SOLID AND STABLE COMPANY WHERE MY JOB DUTIES STAY INTERESTING AND CHALLENGING. MANAGEMENT RECOGNIZES AND APPRECIATES MY DEDICATION AND LOYALTY TO THE COMPANY. IT IS A REWARDING COMPANY TO WORK FOR."**

**— KIM, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

#### **EMPLOYEE STORY: KIM, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

Kim started working at Oregon Spice in October 1995. Over the past 17 years he has held numerous positions within the company: Production Worker, Blend Technician, Acting Warehouse Manager, Warehouse Manger, and, currently, Director of Operations.



As the company has grown, Kim's thorough knowledge of the inner workings of the spice operations combined with his organizational skills, positive attitude, and hard work have allowed him to grow with it. He says management encourages ongoing professional development and most recently, sent him to Discover Leadership, an intensive leadership training that was very beneficial.

#### **OPEN DOOR POLICY**

Managers and leaders adhere to a firm open door policy. Employees know that if needed, they can walk into their manager' office, or even Patty's office, at any time and ask for help. In general, managers are hands-on and employees trust that they can count on them to be available when they need them.

#### **EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION**

Oregon Spice believes that when employees are happy, they are more productive and the quality of their work is higher. To recognize and appreciate employee contributions, leadership goes beyond birthday cards and continuously looks for what might be meaningful for each employee. For example, in recognition of strong sales, the sales team recently gave tablet computers to their customer service representatives while taking them out for a celebratory dinner.



#### **HOLIDAY CARDS**

Each year, Oregon Spice gives all employees a holiday card that includes a cash gift. The amount has consistently been between \$150 and \$200 each year and the company has not had to skip a

**"WE WOULD NOT BE WHERE WE ARE TODAY WITHOUT OUR EMPLOYEES. IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS."**

**— PATTY BODAY, PRESIDENT**

**BUSHIDŌ 武士道**  
**CODE OF OUR TEAM**

year since the first year. The company says that the holidays are a time when people focus on their families. The extra cash gives employees an opportunity to relax.

### WHAT'S NEXT

Patty knows that the bigger and more successful Oregon Spice becomes, the more challenging it will be to bring meaning to each employee. Currently she and her team are focused on improving in-house coaching and tying performance more directly to pay. They recently wrote a "Bushido" to guide their actions.

### Oregon Spice Bushido

Bushido is the code of a samurai, and for Oregon Spice, the "code of our team". It ties in with our internal company values:

1. Good hearted people: This equals the bushido, it determines who will be allowed to be part of our team
2. Quality without compromise
3. Service, above and beyond



## ABOUT THE PREMIER EMPLOYER PROJECT

Northwest Food Processors Education & Research Institute (ERI) received a generous award from the Hitachi Foundation to identify companies that have innovative employee engagement practices that promote economic opportunities for lower-income employees. These practices are an integral part of the company's strategy for sustaining and improving business results. Through this project 12 case studies of Premier Employers from the Food Processing industry have been written and are available at [www.nwfpa.org](http://www.nwfpa.org) and [www.foodinnovationmarketplace.com](http://www.foodinnovationmarketplace.com).



## ABOUT THE HITACHI FOUNDATION

The Hitachi Foundation is an independent nonprofit philanthropic forging an authentic integration of business actions and societal well-being in North America. Through 2013, the organization's strategic focus is on discovering and expanding business practices that create tangible, enduring economic opportunities for low-wealth Americans, their families, and the communities in which they reside—while also enhancing business value.



## ABOUT THE NORTHWEST FOOD PROCESSORS EDUCATION & RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Incorporated in 2007, Northwest Food Processors Education Research Institute (ERI) exists to enhance the overall economic health of the Northwest food processing cluster and the communities it supports. ERI provides research and support to the food processing industry.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT ROSE MARSHALL:  
[RMARSHALL@NWFPA.ORG](mailto:RMARSHALL@NWFPA.ORG)

Writer and Layout: Jennifer Ruwart