

OPENING BELL

BEST COMPANIES / MADE IN WASHINGTON / EXECUTIVE MOVES / DARING WOMEN



HOSPITALITY EDGE.

Columbia Hospitality founder and Chief Executive Officer John Oppenheimer, seated second from the right, with, clockwise from the left, Rob Leonard, Meredith Mara, Teddy Teklemichael, Katie Nessel and Soojin Lim.

BEST COMPANIES

STAYING POWER

COLUMBIA HOSPITALITY
BUCKS THE TREND IN AN
INDUSTRY NOTORIOUS
FOR HIGH TURNOVER

by Emma Franke

THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY is known for high stress, low wages and long hours that make it hard to keep employees happy, leading to high turnover. John Oppenheimer, chief executive officer of Seattle-based Columbia Hospitality Inc., is proud to note that those turnover rates are significantly lower at his company than the national average, which is estimated to be up to

75 percent annually at hospitality companies.

“Acting with enthusiasm and in the spirit of service becomes contagious,” Oppenheimer says. “People that love doing that love working here.”

Columbia operates 43 properties in 27 different communities across the western United States, including hotels and resorts, conference centers, golf courses and residential towers, and has five more projects under construction. The company had revenue last year of \$160 million.

Columbia offers standard 401(k) plans and benefits, along with the additional perks of meals during shifts in property restaurants, and the opportunity to stay at properties in the portfolio. Most significantly, team members at Columbia note that the environment is one of support and open communication.

“I love our commitment to our team members and our customers and to continuous, incremental improvement in everything we do,” said one

anonymous employee on the survey nominating the company as one of *Seattle Business* magazine’s Best Companies to Work For. “Our people are inspiring at every level of the organization, and our properties are amazing.”

Oppenheimer, who launched the company in 1995 after being selected by the Port of Seattle to manage the then-new Bell Harbor International Conference Center, says he considers it the highest recommendation when team members encourage their own family members to apply.

“At last count, we had over 90 family units in the company,” he says. **SB**



Best Companies is a new monthly feature that focuses on one of SEATTLE BUSINESS magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For as voted by employees.