

7 Kurt Salmon Associates

“Joining this firm means striving to surpass your own expectations,”

says Vivek Gambhir, a 34-year-old project manager. “You learn how to run companies, how to invest in them, and how to make a difference. Whatever your goals, you will discover limitless opportunity here.”

A New York-based vice president at the same firm adds, “It’s the best place in the world — not just the consulting world — to learn general manager skills and find out what it takes to make change really happen in companies.”

“The people are absolutely amazing,” gushes another.

And so the tribe has spoken. And if what the tribal members tell us is true, Bain & Company is one vibrant isle you don’t want to get thrown off of.

The 30-year-old firm, with its 2,800 professionals worldwide, is today widely known for its cohesive — some say cultish — culture. If the firm has any faults, super-loyal Bainies don’t appear ready to reveal them.

● Our culture and success as a firm depends on a collaborative approach,” says Lynn Spuhler, a vice president who joined the firm 27 years ago. “If you are a lone wolf and are most successful operating independently, KSA is not the place where you will be the most successful.”

Founded in 1935, KSA advises consumer products, retail, and healthcare clients on strategy, process, and technology deployment. With about 270 consultants in the U.S., the firm still feels relatively small and entrepreneurial. As a result, there aren’t as many processes in place.

“To be successful, you cannot be a wallflower,” says a 31-year-old manager in California. “You must take the initiative. For example, you must make the phone call directly to get the project you want.”

KSAers travel a lot — nearly 65 percent of KSA respondents travel between three and five days a week — but they also enjoy a great deal of latitude in determining their schedules. Nearly 93 percent of KSAers are satisfied with the company’s flexible work arrangement policy. One practice leader works four days and spends Fridays volunteering in her daughter’s school, says Pam Beckerman, KSA’s director of human resources.

Work/life balance is also a team issue. At the start of each engagement, project leaders meet with the consultants to develop what they call a “Life Balance” agreement. These agreements specify project objectives and strategies to be used to achieve work/life balance. And, you can say “no” to a manager here.

Depending on the role and the assignments, some of the consultants are “relocators,” and relocate to the client with their families for the duration of an engagement. They avoid the stress of traveling and get to see their families most nights. A salary premium is paid to them, and their rent is also subsidized, Beckerman says.

Colleagues are friendly, politics are minimized, and backstabbers are advised to check their daggers at the door, or so KSA consultants told us. Although it’s a team-based culture, individual accomplishments get noticed. Given that the firm operates within a consensus-building environment, the decision-making process may appear slow to outsiders. The culture is time-tested, so newcomers will need to adapt.

Tribal members simply love everything Bain. As a result, they are at the top of each of our six equally weighted categories used to determine which employers topped our 10 Best Firms to Work For: Career Development, Compensation & Benefits, Culture, Leadership, On the Job, and Work/Life.

Not surprisingly, those firms that join Bain on our list of Best Firms share much in common. While each of their cultures breeds consultants who never stray far from time-tested client-centric banter, their efforts to develop and reward talent have set them apart

Best 10

Leadership

1. Bain & Company
2. Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath
3. Kurt Salmon Associates
4. Hewitt Associates
5. Sapient
6. Monitor Group
7. Booz Allen Hamilton
8. Milliman USA
9. McKinsey & Company
10. Mercer Management Consulting

Compensation & Benefits

1. Bain & Company
2. McKinsey & Company
3. Boston Consulting Group
4. Milliman USA
5. Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath
6. Hewitt Associates
7. Kurt Salmon Associates
8. Booz Allen Hamilton
9. Mercer Management Consulting
10. Towers Perrin

Culture

1. Bain & Company
2. Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath
3. Hewitt Associates
4. Booz Allen Hamilton
5. McKinsey & Company
6. Kurt Salmon Associates
7. Monitor Group
8. Milliman USA
9. Mercer Management Consulting
10. Boston Consulting Group