

Ask the Execs

What makes a workplace thrive? Five leaders from this year's 100 Best Companies to Work For in Oregon weigh in on company culture, professional growth, leadership advice and more.



ALEX COLAS
VP, Preconstruction | Colas Construction



MARC-DANIEL DOMOND
VP, Operations | Colas Construction

When you reflect on your company's culture, what are you most proud of and why?

Alex Colas: We have a culture of believers. Our firm has long been a proverbial dark horse, and the people who chose to join us bought into a vision that was not yet fully visible. That takes conviction. What makes me most proud is seeing that vision realized alongside individuals who committed to something before it was proven. That shared belief is the foundation of our culture.

Marc-Daniel Domond: I'm most proud of the genuine care that defines our culture. We care deeply about our communities, our employees and the people we work alongside every day. That care isn't performative or situational. It's intrinsic to who we are. It shows up in how we make decisions, how we treat one another and how we approach our work. I believe authenticity is what draws people to us and makes them want to be part of what we're building. I'm also proud that we don't become complacent. We celebrate our wins, but we don't rest on them. There's a constant drive to improve, to refine systems, reduce friction and find better ways to support our teams and the communities we serve. That commitment to continuous improvement, paired with a strong heart for people, is what makes our culture special and sustainable.

Steve Ritchie: I am very proud of the learning and teaching environment at our firm. We try to reinforce that mistakes are nothing more than opportunity to learn. While operating very professionally, we also make sure not to take ourselves too seriously. Enjoying the people you work with and the work environment is a keystone of our firm. Finally, I am very proud of the fact that we embrace the concept of balancing work and life. We strive to fit our work around the personal needs of our staff, and I think we are largely successful in that.

Steve Seguin: What I'm most proud of is how our culture has grown and how thoughtfully it's evolved over our firm's 65-year history. It wasn't built overnight. We've worked hard to create a place where people can bring their authentic selves to work, share unique strengths, and still rely on one another with respect and trust. Our firm provides a platform for both personal and professional growth, supporting individuals as they develop not just in their careers, but as people. We honor our traditions, even the quirky and old-fashioned ones, while embracing new ideas, driven by younger generations, that help our culture grow. Our approachable, nimble culture keeps us grounded and humble. Above all, we put our employees first—because when they thrive, everything else falls into place.

Amber White: We prioritize open communication and collaboration, ensuring that everyone is informed and engaged in our shared mission. When decisions are made, we share the "why" so employees can understand the factors that led to each decision. I am especially proud of the respect and trust that have been built as a result; employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and feedback, knowing their voices are valued. This transparency not only strengthens our team but also drives continuous improvement throughout the organization.

Can you share a recent initiative or moment that you feel truly embodies your company's values in action?

Alex Colas: Our commitment to self-performing structural concrete across projects of all sizes, including the recent execution of a 2,100-cubic-yard mat slab. Our self-perform crews give us direct control of critical path work. On our West 6th project, we advanced the schedule and maximized efficiencies through tight coordination between our development and construction teams. This approach demands disciplined planning, precise coordination and rigorous safety oversight. Our teams arrive prepared each day with a clear purpose: move the work forward with discipline and care so our projects can serve communities with pride for generations.

Marc-Daniel Domond: This year we had the privilege of building an ADA access ramp, at no cost, for an 85-year-old woman who is a double amputee. She has lived in her Northeast Portland home since 1968. When we learned about the daily challenges she faced simply trying to get to the store, attend doctor appointments, or leave her house, we knew we had an opportunity to make a meaningful difference. Our team came together to design and

build a ramp that connected her home to the street, giving her safe and reliable access to the outside world. It was more than a construction project. It was about restoring dignity, independence and freedom. Seeing the joy on her face when she used the ramp for the first time was incredibly moving. Moments like that remind us why we do what we do. Our work is not just about building structures. It is about caring for people and strengthening the communities we are part of.

Steve Ritchie: We recently took our entire firm along with their significant others on a long weekend to San Diego. There were no presentations or work sessions. We just spent time with each other to build relationships and create lifelong memories together. We also rolled out our KS Keystones program last summer, which encompasses and defines our company culture. We believe strongly in One Firm, Whole Life—we operate as a team and care for the whole person, supporting each other’s work, growth and lives beyond the office.

Steve Seguin: In 2025, we launched our first year-round wellness campaign, focusing on holistic health: mental, physical and emotional. From expert speakers to healthy recipes, prizes, a summer step challenge and even in-office chair massages, we covered it all. Supporting our employees’ well-being is important because it helps them thrive not just at work, but in everyday life.

Amber White: The creation of the profit sharing plan. For approximately 25% of our employees, this marked their first dollar contributed to a retirement plan. I am very proud that this plan was established, as it demonstrates the company’s commitment to recognizing and rewarding the hard work of its employees. Not only does it provide financial security for staff, but it also reinforces our dedication to fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace where everyone’s contributions are valued.

How do you promote professional growth, learning and career advancement for employees?

Alex Colas: We invest in our people by giving them meaningful autonomy to shape their career trajectory. We encourage team members to bring forward interests, ideas and opportunities for growth. Advancement is earned through ownership, performance and authentic alignment with our core values. The individuals who embody those values consistently are, in my view, among the strongest professionals in our industry.

Marc-Daniel Domond: We intentionally invest in our people and give them real support in shaping their development. We provide educational stipends and encourage continuing education so team members can expand their skills and stay sharp in a constantly evolving industry. We do not put artificial caps on what is possible. If someone wants to stretch into a new role, take on more responsibility or lead an initiative, we create space for that to happen.

Steve Ritchie: We like to see every new hire as a potential future partner, so we invest in our team’s professional and personal growth. Our Kernutt Stokes University training program provides technical training at every level as well as invaluable training in areas such as leadership, marketing, business development and more. Additionally, our KINSHIP program provides mentoring and coaching to provide support and guidance from the first day on the job all the way through becoming a partner within our firm.

Steve Seguin: We support professional growth and career advancement in ways that fit each employee’s everyday work, including training, professional organizations and other learning opportunities. Associates and team members work alongside senior partners, receiving mentorship tailored to their goals. Career development isn’t one-size-fits-all; we help each person build on their strengths and interests. Partly because we are a mid-size firm, we offer an entrepreneurial environment where employees can take initiative and grow through client responsibilities, team projects and active participation. These experiences build transferable skills, including networking, communication and collaboration, beyond formal leadership roles.

Amber White: Our approach has centered on robust training and development initiatives. Notably, the HR Director established a leadership cohort program designed to identify



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emerging leaders within the organization. These employees set clear professional goals and are paired with internal mentors who guide their development journey. This initiative goes beyond enhancing technical skills and is intentionally focused on cultivating future leaders, emphasizing competencies such as strategic thinking, communication and team management to ensure a well-rounded leadership pipeline for the company.

Beyond the balance sheet, how do you define “success” within your workplace?

Alex Colas: Success is the lasting impression we leave on clients and partners. It is reflected in voluntary testimonials and in hearing that people speak highly of us when we are not in the room. There is no greater validation than knowing you are living your values consistently enough that others recognize and affirm them.

Marc-Daniel Domond: When we receive a testimonial that reflects not just satisfaction, but trust. That kind of reputation is earned slowly, through consistent action and integrity over time. Success at Colas is measured in trust, credibility and the positive impact we leave behind long after the job is complete.

Steve Ritchie: We define success as getting better every day. That can range anywhere from the staff level in learning and developing to improving our processes and procedures to improving our client experience.

Steve Seguin: This is the million-dollar question! Success is creating a firm where people *want* to come to work, not *have* to come to work. A place where engagement, purpose and collaboration drive everything we do. It’s our “secret sauce,” and we’re far from perfecting it. Success is also about balance: integrating new ideas and approaches while holding onto the values and traditions the firm was founded on.

Amber White: True success is achieved when the bank consistently creates value for all its stakeholders—employees, customers and the community—while upholding a strong reputation for trustworthiness and dependability. This approach ensures that our achievements are sustainable and meaningful, reflecting our commitment to integrity and long-term relationships.

What does inclusion on the 100 Best Companies to Work For in Oregon list represent for your team?

Alex Colas: It represents alignment. It affirms that our people genuinely believe in and experience the values our leadership promotes. Culture cannot be manufactured through surveys. It must be practiced daily. Our mission is to build legacies and strengthen communities. When our team feels that mission in a tangible way, we know we are on the right path.

Marc-Daniel Domond: Inclusion on the list is confirmation that we are building something meaningful together. When our employees respond in a way that places us on that list, it tells us that our values are not aspirational statements. They are lived realities. When our team feels connected to our mission and believes we are living it with authenticity, that recognition becomes more than an award.

Steve Ritchie: It reinforces our focus on building a workplace where people feel supported, challenged and empowered to grow and that our employees are experiencing exactly that. It means that we are doing great work at a great place to work.

Steve Seguin: In 2026, our firm is celebrating 20 years on Oregon’s 100 Best list—longer than any other law firm in the state. This didn’t happen by accident. We stuck with it, putting in the work—both challenging and rewarding—because we believe in creating a great workplace. Most importantly, this recognition is only possible because of our employees. Their dedication, collaboration and commitment are what truly make our firm a great place to work.

Amber White: It is a significant achievement for our team, as it highlights our commitment to fostering a positive, supportive and engaging workplace. This recognition not only affirms our status as an employer of choice but also demonstrates to current and prospective employees that we value their well-being and professional growth. Such acknowledgment elevates the bank’s reputation, attracts top talent and increases customer trust, all of which are essential for driving our ongoing growth and success.


What is the most impactful piece of leadership or career advice you’ve received?

Alex Colas: To practice explicit clarity and listen for cues. People communicate and interpret information differently. One of the most important lessons I have learned as a leader is that listening is a discipline. When you truly listen, you gain insight, trust and the opportunity to grow alongside the people you lead.

Marc-Daniel Domond: The most impactful leadership advice I’ve received is simple, but it has shaped everything about how I lead: Treat everyone the way you want to be treated, and never ask someone to do something you wouldn’t be willing to do yourself. That mindset removes hierarchy from leadership and replaces it with shared responsibility. It keeps me grounded. It’s a reminder that credibility is earned through example, not title. When your team knows you are willing to step into the hard conversations, the uncomfortable moments, or even the unglamorous tasks alongside them, trust grows naturally.

Steve Ritchie: One thing that has always stuck with me is advice I received from one of our former partners, Dave Sparks: “Say what you mean, explain what you are going to do and do what you say you will.” Dave embodies that statement and I strive to meet that standard.

Steve Seguin: The best leadership advice I’ve received is to hire the right people, give them the tools and platform to succeed, and then trust them to do their jobs. Provide space and autonomy, even when it’s hard in a law firm. Never take your team for granted, because how you lead your people is ultimately what drives success.

Amber White: To regularly ask for feedback from mentors, peers and team members. Constructive feedback can help you identify blind spots, improve your performance and foster a culture of continuous improvement. By actively seeking feedback, you demonstrate openness to growth and set an example for others to follow, ultimately enhancing both personal and team development. 

The 100 Best Companies to Work For in Oregon survey measures employee opinion on 20 different workplace practices, grouped into five key categories: work environment, management & communication, decision-making & trust, career development & learning, and benefits & compensation.

Employers recognized on this year's list stand out for their commitment to creating environments where employees feel valued and supported. From flexible work schedules and generous benefits packages to clear communication and opportunities for advancement, these companies prioritize outstanding workplace practices that help their teams thrive.

Employee survey responses make it clear that compensation is only part of the equation. In 2026, the work environment category received the highest satisfaction rating at 92.5%. As one staff member shared about their employer: "They offer a great work-life balance, put people first, and promote a healthy work environment so that employees are mentally, physically and emotionally healthy."

Congratulations to all the companies recognized on this list.



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