

AS SEEN IN BEST PLACES TO WORK

FIRST PLACE

MEDIUM COMPANIES

Flexibility helps 'free thinkers' find happiness and success

BY STEVE VOCKRODT | STAFF WRITER

In the offices and cubicles that make up the headquarters of [iNEK Technologies LLC](#), the walls and desks aren't lined with photos of employees' spouses, children and friends like one is bound to find in most office buildings.

Instead, employees display framed certificates documenting technological abilities they've earned working at the Overland Park-based software development and information technology consulting firm.

"Indian guys like to put up their credentials," said Venkata Vadlamani, vice president of operations for iNEK.

Nearly all the employees at iNEK come from India, either permanently or temporarily.

As such, the company features many departures from what workers might come to expect in an American working environment.

For one, Vadlamani doesn't care whether his employees show up at 8 a.m. or 9 a.m.

He knows that some employees have different responsibilities to tend to in their lives away from work.

He also realizes the practical advantage in employees coming and leaving



iNEK Technologies LLC

Services: Software development and information technology development

Location: 9200 Indian Creek Parkway, Suite 187, Overland Park, KS 66210

Employees: 120, 50 in Kansas City.

Principal: CEO Aruna Mandadi

at different times. He can count on someone being in the office early when East Coast clients call and on others staying late if West Coast clients need help.

"For me, business is business, and they're happy they can take care of their personal needs," Vadlamani said.

That flexibility encapsulates the office environment that sets iNEK apart from many other businesses. "We are free thinkers," he said. "And when you have boundaries defined, your thinking is limited."

Employees stroll the halls in T-shirts, jeans and running shoes. The time employees spend communicating with one another via instant messaging isn't time wasted in Vadlamani's eyes. If workers need time off work, Vadlamani encourages them to take it, and

he'll even pay for part of the airfare to help them get to where they need to go, such as halfway across the globe in India.

If someone asks Vadlamani why he would help them pay for travel that's not business related, his answer is unequivocal, almost to the point of being flip.

"Just for the heck of it," he said.

"That \$300 is going to help them pay for a credit card bill or a cell phone or something. I'm trying to run a multimillion-dollar business. \$250 is nothing."

The seemingly free-wheeling management style resonates with appreciation from employees, many of whom don't have families nearby.

"It's not a routine," Sales Manager Mrunal Chettiar said. "You have a personal touch."

CEO Aruna Mandadi started iNEK in 2004. It provides Web-oriented software and IT support primarily for Fortune 500 companies.

Because it can command sizable fees -for-service from large companies, iNEK can pay employees relatively well, offering as much as \$70,000 for entry-level employees. Not all new workers have technology backgrounds.

Vadlamani said he'll take a well-grounded applicant with a sociology degree and make him or her into an IT expert if the person demonstrates the wherewithal to pick up something new.

"I am more into common sense, logical understanding and a willingness to learn something new," he said. "I am more into common sense, logical understanding and a willingness to learn something new," he said.

Shirley Folch, human resources manager for iNEK, said many employees with the company today were with it when iNEK started.

She attributed that to an almost family-like quality to the work environment that encourages productivity.

"You're not a number, a name and a social security number," she said.

"You are a person."

And those in upper management don't appear to put themselves above the employees.

Although Vadlamani has an office, CEO Mandadi sits at a small desk behind a row of cubicles at the company's newly opened second floor of its Corporate Woods office.



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