

ELLE

The Company She Keeps

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They came, they saw, they launched. And then women dot-com executives gave their ultra-hard-working employees sushi, live music, massages, and long vacations. These women of the Web have created fabulous jobs and dynamic, beautiful work environments. They take pleasure in treating their workers like treasured colleagues – giving them all the comforts of home on the job. They've cooked up generous ways to share not only the wealth, but the luxury of the new Net glamour.

“Commitment and fun aside, money is largely what the new Web culture is really about, and every CEO knows seasoned talent in the Net is tough to come by, so they do everything within their power to hold on to what they have.

“Valerie Frederickson, CEO of Valerie Frederickson & Company in Menlo Park near San Francisco, sees daily how easily the Siren call of great perks can lure away satisfied employees. Her six-year-old company of twenty-five people recruits professionals for the hottest and wealthiest high-tech firms in Silicon Valley. So Frederickson routinely tries to improve her own staff's contentment quotient.

“Playing on the current version of the American dream of whether marrying a multimillionaire or becoming one by holding stock that goes through the roof at its initial public offering (IPO), thirty-seven-year-old Frederickson has developed a fantasy-fulfilling stock-options benefit. She calls it her “Get Rich Quick Plan.” Frederickson takes partial payment for her services in stock from pre-IPO start-up clients. She also buys stock in all of her client's companies that have gone public. The shares go into one pool that is divided among her employees – from the receptionist on up.

“She indulges her workers in other ways. “Everyone gets a free gym membership,” she says, “and every Friday we convert the vice president's office into a massage studio.” The company has a full kitchen, and employees can e-mail their orders for snack food to the office manager. But when they really need to break out, they leave. Well, just for an hour or two.

“Sometimes we all troop down to a local florist and come back with hundreds of flowers,” she says, “A beautiful workplace is very satisfying.

“Glass walls transfuse light between offices at Frederickson's company. To make employees feel even more at home at work, she foots the bill for original paintings and sculpture chosen by individual staff members for their personal space.

“Still, timing is critical down in the Valley, and the pace hectic, and Frederickson admits her employees rarely can take coinciding vacations. “Sometimes we go off on short, intense luxurious vacations, like four days in Paris or a long weekend at a spa in Mexico,” she says. When near-ultimate burnout

demands an extreme vacation, she has chosen white-water kayaking in the Amazon; others have gone heli-skiing in Alaska.

“Like all of these e-commerce CEOs, Frederickson stops only to sleep. “If I have an hour to myself before I go to bed,” she says, “I feel like I’ve been on vacation.” She has lots of help to keep herself up and running: “I have a personal trainer, a housekeeper, a plant caretaker, and a part-time valet,” says Frederickson. “My employees can afford to have dog walkers, maids. And personal trainers.”