



REFERENCE RESPONSES

We're excited that you've chosen to nominate your company or an individual for the Employee Happiness Awards – South Africa 2026.

In the second step of the nomination process, we require you to share brief responses explaining why you deserve to win in the category or categories you have selected. To support you, we have drafted simple reference responses for each category.

Please note the following guidelines carefully:

- This response is a crucial part of the submission process, as finalists will be shortlisted based on the information shared here.
- The sample responses provided are based on best practices followed by real organisations across the world. This information is available in the public domain. We have curated and compiled the most relevant points to serve as a reference for you.
- We do not require you to copy these responses. Instead, use them as a guide to highlight your specific initiatives, context, and impact in the most effective manner.
- It is important to clearly demonstrate why your nomination is relevant and fitting for the category you have selected. Please avoid generic statements. Use specific examples to make your submission sharper and more category-focused.
- The jury is looking for clear insights on impact, challenges faced, and achievements delivered for each category.
- Please ensure that your response does not exceed 500 words.

If you have any further questions, please write to us at aruna@eventyst.com

We hope this reference helps make the nomination process clearer and simpler for you.

Company Categories

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	MOCK REFERENCE RESPONSE (SOUTH AFRICA)
1 Best Employee Wellness Initiative	Recognizes companies that have designed and executed impactful wellness programs addressing physical and/or emotional well-being. Entries should highlight the scale of execution and measurable outcomes such as improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and overall employee satisfaction.	[Company Name] implemented a comprehensive employee wellness program over the past 14 months, targeting physical, emotional, and financial well-being. Initiatives included onsite and virtual fitness classes, weekly nutrition workshops, stress management seminars, and mental health counseling via a local Employee Assistance Program. A mobile app provided personalized wellness tracking and peer support forums. Financial wellness workshops focused on debt management, savings, and retirement planning. Engagement reached 85%, absenteeism reduced by 20%, and productivity increased measurably. Employee surveys reflected higher satisfaction, improved morale, and stronger team cohesion. The program reinforced a culture of holistic well-being across South Africa offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban.
2 Best Flexible Working Program	For organizations that have designed the most effective working model — balancing remote, hybrid, and onsite structures while ensuring business performance. Recognizes initiatives that promote employee happiness, reduce costs, and increase efficiency without compromising organizational goals.	Over 15 months, [Company Name] introduced a highly adaptive hybrid work model for South African teams, balancing remote, office, and field-based roles. Employees could customize schedules while maintaining performance metrics. Initiatives included digital collaboration platforms, virtual team-building events, manager training for remote supervision, and clear communication guidelines. Flexible work arrangements led to a 22% increase in employee satisfaction, enhanced retention, and a measurable boost in productivity. The program also reduced commuting-related stress and operational costs, demonstrating a strategic balance between employee happiness and business performance in South Africa.
3 Best Workspace Design	Celebrates organizations that create smart, ergonomic, and wellness-oriented work environments aligned with their culture. Whether it's open collaboration zones, innovative meeting spaces, or mindful design for employee recharging, this award recognizes workplaces that inspire productivity and well-being.	[Company Name] redesigned its Johannesburg and Cape Town offices over 12 months to foster productivity, creativity, and employee well-being. Innovations included ergonomic workstations, quiet zones, open collaboration hubs, wellness lounges, meditation rooms, and rooftop green spaces. Smart lighting, indoor air quality improvements, and acoustic solutions were implemented. Employees participated in co-design workshops to align spaces with needs and culture. Engagement surveys showed a 25% increase in satisfaction, and project output improved by 18%. The new workspace promotes collaboration, innovation, and a sense of pride among staff, reflecting a modern, people-first approach to work in South Africa.
4 Most Supportive 'Return to Work' Program	Honors organizations that actively support employees, especially women and caregivers, rejoining the workforce after a career break. Recognizes initiatives offering flexibility, fair pay, mentorship, and clear career growth paths.	[Company Name] launched a 14-month "Return to Work" program targeting employees returning after career breaks, with a focus on parents, caregivers, and women. Initiatives included mentorship, flexible hours, skills refreshers, reintegration workshops, and career pathing. 22 participants returned successfully, 95% reported confidence in resuming responsibilities, and performance metrics aligned with peers. Managers received training on inclusivity, empathy, and career coaching. Additional support included childcare access and phased workload plans. The initiative enhanced retention, boosted morale, and fostered an inclusive culture that recognizes diverse career trajectories in South Africa.
5 Best Workplace for Parents in the UAE	For companies that recognize the unique challenges of working parents. This includes flexible work options, supportive leave policies, access to childcare, and empathetic cultural practices that help parents balance professional and personal responsibilities.	[Company Name] implemented family-friendly policies and programs over 13 months, supporting parents across South African offices. Initiatives included extended parental leave, flexible schedules, remote work options, childcare support, family wellness events, and career coaching for working parents. Employee surveys showed a 30% increase in perceived work-life balance, while retention of parents improved by 18%. Leadership actively promoted a culture of empathy and understanding, helping employees manage professional responsibilities alongside family commitments. This program exemplifies a supportive workplace that enables parents to thrive.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	MOCK REFERENCE RESPONSE (SOUTH AFRICA)
6	Best Diversity and Inclusion Program Rewards organizations that foster diverse teams across age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, while ensuring employees feel valued, included, and empowered in an equitable workplace.	[Company Name] strengthened D&I initiatives across South African offices over 15 months, focusing on racial, gender, generational, and differently-abled representation. Programs included unconscious bias training, leadership mentoring, ERGs for women, youth, and people of determination, and targeted inclusive recruitment campaigns. Internal surveys showed a 20% increase in employees feeling valued and included. Leadership diversity improved by 12%, and retention among underrepresented groups increased. The company also hosted town halls and cultural awareness sessions, creating an environment where all employees feel empowered, safe, and recognized.
7	Best Employee Reward & Recognition Strategy Recognizes innovative and fair reward strategies tailored to a multi-generational workforce, addressing evolving motivators from Gen Z to Millennials and beyond.	Over 14 months, [Company Name] implemented a multi-tiered recognition strategy tailored to South African teams, covering financial incentives, career development opportunities, and social recognition. Initiatives included quarterly performance awards, peer-to-peer digital recognition platforms, personalized development plans, and team celebrations for project milestones. Employee engagement surveys showed a 22% increase in satisfaction, and productivity metrics improved. The program nurtured a culture of appreciation, motivating employees across all levels while fostering inclusivity and loyalty within the workforce.
8	Best L&D Strategy For organizations providing cutting-edge learning and development opportunities that prepare employees for future business needs while advancing their personal growth.	[Company Name] rolled out a dynamic 13-month learning and development program in South Africa, incorporating digital learning platforms, in-person workshops, cross-functional projects, leadership bootcamps, and mentorship programs. Personalized learning paths were created using AI-driven skills assessments. Participation reached 90%, with employees demonstrating a 15% increase in competency scores. Internal promotions of high-potential employees increased by 18%. The program empowered staff to advance professionally while building organizational capability for future growth in South Africa's competitive market.
9	Best Internship Program Celebrates companies that spot and nurture young talent through structured internship programs, offering career pathways and valuable pre-placement opportunities.	[Company Name] launched a 12-month internship program for South African students, providing hands-on experience, mentorship, and structured learning paths. Interns rotated across departments and worked on meaningful projects tied to business outcomes. Skill-building workshops, networking opportunities, and career guidance were included. 95% of interns reported improved employability, with 60% receiving full-time offers. The program emphasized diversity, inclusion, and alignment with local workforce development needs, reflecting a commitment to nurturing young talent and building a future-ready workforce.
10	Best Leadership Succession Strategy Recognizes structured, visionary programs that identify and prepare high-potential employees for leadership roles, ensuring business continuity and growth.	[Company Name] implemented a 16-month succession planning program to identify high-potential talent and prepare them for leadership roles. Initiatives included mentorship, rotational assignments, leadership bootcamps, and performance tracking. 90% of critical roles now have ready successors, ensuring business continuity. Employee engagement in leadership cohorts improved by 20%, while knowledge transfer programs increased cross-functional capability. The program demonstrates forward-thinking leadership planning and resilience within South African operations.

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11 Best 'Women-in-Leadership' Program	For organizations that ensure women are represented at the leadership table, creating an environment where their perspectives are respected and future female leaders are inspired.	[Company Name] developed a 15-month program to advance women in leadership across South Africa. Initiatives included mentorship by senior leaders, leadership workshops, networking forums, visibility initiatives, and flexible work options. Female representation in management increased by 25%, engagement scores improved, and women reported greater confidence and growth opportunities. Leadership actively promoted a supportive culture, positioning women as role models and shaping an inclusive organizational culture.
12 Talent Acquisition Team of the Year	Celebrates high-performing recruitment teams that design and deliver innovative, effective talent acquisition strategies. Recognizes organizations that go beyond filling roles — focusing on cultural fit, leveraging technology, and aligning hiring with long-term business needs. This includes excellence in employer branding, outreach, and creative use of platforms (including social media) to attract, engage, and secure top talent.	Over 14 months, [Company Name]'s recruitment team implemented innovative strategies to attract top South African talent, including AI-driven candidate screening, employer branding campaigns, and social media engagement. Initiatives included career fairs, virtual recruitment events, and community partnerships with universities. 95% of new hires met performance expectations, cultural fit improved, and retention increased. The team successfully positioned the company as a preferred employer, strengthened diversity, and built a robust talent pipeline.
13 Best Employee Induction Program	For companies with onboarding programs that integrate new employees quickly and effectively, ensuring seamless adaptation and early productivity.	[Company Name] redesigned onboarding over 12 months, combining virtual orientation, mentorship, interactive workshops, and cultural immersion. Initiatives included buddy programs, onboarding apps, and team integration projects. 90% of new hires felt fully prepared and engaged within the first month. Early productivity increased by 18%, and first-year attrition decreased. The program enhanced knowledge transfer, cultural alignment, and employee satisfaction across South African offices.
14 Best Community Impact Initiative	Recognizes organizations that go beyond CSR compliance, embedding community engagement into their business ethos and actively involving employees in creating social impact.	[Company Name] executed a 16-month community engagement program in South Africa, focusing on education, environmental sustainability, and social empowerment. Employees contributed over 4,000 volunteer hours in local communities, including school mentorship, green energy projects, and women's entrepreneurship programs. Measurable outcomes included improved literacy rates, environmental impact, and empowerment of marginalized groups. Employee satisfaction increased by 20%, demonstrating engagement with socially impactful initiatives embedded in the company ethos.
15 Best Retention Initiative	For companies that achieve retention rates above industry benchmarks by building loyalty, motivation, and long-term employee satisfaction.	Over 14 months, [Company Name] implemented retention-focused programs including career pathing, mentorship, flexible work, wellness programs, and engagement surveys. Voluntary turnover decreased by 15%, engagement improved by 25%, and high-potential retention reached 95%. Regular recognition, skill development, and inclusive culture fostered loyalty and motivation, reinforcing the company's reputation as an employee-centric workplace.

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16 Best Employee Driven Business Change	Celebrates organizations where employee feedback and ideas have sparked significant positive business or cultural changes.	[Company Name] implemented an employee-driven innovation program over 12 months, collecting ideas through workshops, digital forums, and hackathons. Initiatives included process improvements, cost-saving measures, and product innovations. Participation reached 80%, resulting in a 10% efficiency gain. Leadership actively implemented employee ideas, creating measurable business impact while fostering a culture of ownership, empowerment, and collaboration.
17 Best Use of Technology & AI in HR	Recognizes organizations that effectively leverage technology and AI to transform HR practices. This includes using digital tools for real-time feedback, sentiment analysis, and predictive insights to enhance employee engagement and happiness, as well as deploying AI for smarter recruitment, personalized engagement, workforce analytics, and data-driven decision-making that improves the overall employee experience.	Over 15 months, [Company Name] integrated AI and digital tools into HR processes, including recruitment, employee engagement tracking, sentiment analysis, and predictive attrition modeling. Real-time dashboards allowed managers to make data-driven decisions. Initiatives resulted in faster hiring cycles, 20% improved retention prediction accuracy, and increased engagement scores. Technology enabled personalized employee experiences, transforming HR into a strategic business partner.
18 Best Use of Technology to Drive Learning Initiatives	For organizations that deliver engaging, just-in-time, and technology-driven learning solutions that build capabilities and deliver business impact.	[Company Name] leveraged technology for learning over 13 months, deploying AI-driven personalized learning, VR simulations, gamified e-learning, and live expert sessions. Learning analytics tracked progress, identified gaps, and tailored content. Employees reported 25% higher knowledge retention and increased productivity. The program fostered continuous learning, skill enhancement, and business impact across South African teams.
19 Best Inclusion Strategy for People With Disabilities	Recognizes organizations creating inclusive environments for people of determination through accessible infrastructure, policies, training, and equal opportunity practices.	[Company Name] launched a 14-month inclusion program for people of determination in South Africa, including accessible infrastructure, adaptive technologies, specialized training, and mentorship programs. Engagement and retention improved significantly, with representation in teams increasing. Inclusive hiring policies, awareness workshops, and career development initiatives created an equitable environment, empowering employees and promoting organizational resilience.
20 Best Company to Work For – Large	For companies with 250+ employees that have created progressive, fair, and employee-centric workplaces.	[Company Name] with over 500 employees created a people-first culture in 12–16 months, implementing hybrid work models, wellness programs, DEI initiatives, leadership development, and structured career paths. Engagement increased by 22%, voluntary turnover dropped by 15%, and employee satisfaction surveys highlighted trust, growth, and belonging. The company demonstrates large-scale employee-centric practices tailored to South Africa's workforce.

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21 Best Company to Work For – Medium	For companies with 50–249 employees that have built positive, people-first workplaces.	[Company Name] with 150 employees implemented flexible work, wellness programs, learning initiatives, and recognition systems over 14 months. Engagement rose by 20%, turnover decreased, and employees reported strong culture, open communication, and career growth. Initiatives fostered collaboration, innovation, and loyalty.
22 Best Company to Work For – Small	For companies with fewer than 50 employees that ensure a happy, fair, and growth-driven workplace culture.	[Company Name], employing 40 staff, created a highly engaging workplace in 12 months. Initiatives included flexible schedules, peer recognition, skill-building workshops, mentorship, and team retreats. Engagement scores reached 95%, turnover was minimal, and employees reported feeling valued, empowered, and supported in both professional and personal growth.
23 HR Team of the Year	Celebrates HR teams that lead transformative practices driving both employee happiness and strong business outcomes.	[Company Name]'s HR team led transformative initiatives over 15 months, including talent acquisition, onboarding, wellness, L&D, succession planning, and DEI programs. Engagement increased by 25%, attrition decreased by 18%, and business performance metrics improved. The team demonstrated strategic alignment, creativity, and measurable impact on employee happiness and productivity.
24 Best Workplace for Gen Z (New Category)	For organizations that build environments aligned with Gen Z values — flexibility, inclusivity, authenticity, purpose-driven culture, and digital-first ways of working.	[Company Name] implemented Gen Z-focused initiatives over 12 months, including flexible schedules, digital-first collaboration tools, mentorship programs, social impact projects, and recognition initiatives. Engagement surveys showed 90% of Gen Z employees felt valued and inspired. Programs aligned with Gen Z values, purpose-driven work, and tech-enabled workflows, strengthening retention and performance.

Individual Categories

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	MOCK REFERENCE RESPONSE (SOUTH AFRICA)
1 The Rise to Success Award	Recognises an individual who has risen through the ranks from a relatively junior position to a significant leadership role within a company, inspiring others to break barriers and pursue their dreams.	[Nominee Name] has exemplified the meaning of perseverance, leadership, and excellence by rising from a junior role to a significant leadership position within [Company Name] over the past decade. Starting as a [Junior Role] in 2014, [Nominee Name] consistently demonstrated initiative, strategic thinking, and strong interpersonal skills. Over the years, they led key projects that delivered measurable business outcomes, including [specific achievements: revenue growth, process improvements, or market expansion]. Under their leadership, their team grew from 5 to 50 employees, with engagement scores increasing by 30% and retention rates surpassing industry benchmarks. Beyond performance, [Nominee Name] actively mentors young professionals, fosters inclusive team culture, and champions employee well-being initiatives. Testimonials from colleagues highlight their approachable leadership, ability to inspire others, and unwavering commitment to organizational success. Their journey is a blueprint for aspiring leaders and a testament to the impact of determination, vision, and people-centric leadership.
2 HR Leader of the Year	Honors an HR professional with 10+ years of experience who has a proven track record of designing and executing business-relevant HR practices with quantifiable results, along with a history of continued contribution to the HR industry.	[Nominee Name] is an HR visionary with over 15 years of experience delivering transformative people strategies at [Company Name]. They have spearheaded initiatives in talent acquisition, learning and development, performance management, and employee engagement that directly contributed to business growth. Key achievements include reducing attrition by 20%, implementing AI-driven recruitment systems that improved quality of hire, and launching leadership development programs that groomed high-potential talent for senior roles. [Nominee Name] is recognized for data-driven decision-making, innovative HR technologies, and fostering an inclusive culture. Employees report high engagement under their leadership, citing transparent communication, mentorship, and continuous support for career progression. Colleagues commend their strategic alignment of HR practices with organizational objectives, making HR a critical driver of business success. Their influence extends beyond the company through thought leadership, industry contributions, and active participation in HR forums, establishing them as a respected leader in the HR field.
3 Woman HR Icon of the Year	This award honors a woman who has broken barriers and demonstrated exceptional leadership in the field of human resources. Her vision, passion, and impact have not only led to personal success but also paved the way for future female leaders in the field.	[Nominee Name] has broken barriers in the HR domain by demonstrating exceptional leadership, innovation, and advocacy for inclusion and employee well-being. Over her 12-year career, she has led initiatives that transformed HR practices, including diversity and inclusion programs, talent acceleration strategies, and employee engagement campaigns. Key accomplishments include increasing female representation in leadership roles by 30%, implementing mentorship programs for women, and leading organizational culture transformations that improved employee satisfaction scores by 25%. She is widely respected for her mentorship, empowering emerging female HR leaders, and fostering environments where all employees feel valued and heard. Testimonials from peers and mentees highlight her strategic vision, empathy, and unwavering commitment to creating equitable workplaces. Beyond organizational impact, she is an active industry voice, sharing insights at conferences, publishing thought leadership articles, and participating in national HR forums, making her a role model for women in HR globally.