

SMALL EMPLOYERS



(2) | Expel Inc.

INDUSTRY: INFORMATION SECURITY
TOTAL EMPLOYEES: 93
CONSECUTIVE YEARS RANKED: 1

Expel is one of the youngest companies on this year's Top Workplaces list. Founder Dave Merkel, known to employees simply as "Merk," started Expel out of his barn in Herndon, Va.,

three years ago and quickly attracted funding from venture capitalists.

Today, Expel is growing quickly and has a visible presence at local industry conferences. Company leadership, however, appears determined to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with tech start-ups where management trends toward secrecy and new hires are prone to burnout.

"Working 80 hours a week at a start-

up is not a healthy lifestyle if you do that for six months," Merkel said. "We want people to come here and have a good experience."

He works to keep the small company informed through monthly "barn-doggles," where they discuss the company's direction. The company practices what executives call "radical transparency;" everything short of individual employees' health and pay are fair game. That includes how much cash the company has on hand, Merkel said, something that start-ups usually consider proprietary.

The company recruits people from all over the local cybersecurity industry, many of them coming from government agencies. One new hire is Nilo Rahmani, a site reliability engineer who joined the company nine months ago. Before joining Expel, Rahmani worked for a large consulting company, where she said she primarily was responsible for maintaining older, legacy computer systems.

Things are different at Expel, she said.

"Here I get to work on new technology that I actually enjoy . . . on technology that is new," Rahmani said. "That's really important for an engineer."