

First Great Western – ‘Together We Can Stamp It Out’ Campaign

Introduction

First Great Western train operating company run 9,500 services every week, (over 1500 trains per weekday) calling at 276 stations. Their trains cover a total 70 million miles and carry 103 million passengers every year, providing high speed, commuter, regional and branch line train and sleeper services across the Greater Western rail franchise area.

‘Together We Can Stamp It Out’ Campaign

In 2011, FGW embarked on a journey to improve customer service and identified that its people where the key to success. A review of people-related processes and policies revealed a rise in incidents of bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

Rhys Owen, Head of Employee Relations at FGW explains: *“When we looked at our own internal discrimination and harassment claims, we realised that there was much more we could do to help our own staff reduce incidents, improving not only our own written policies, but how these policies are communicated to staff.”*

This led to a work stream to tackle discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Sharon Johnston, Human Resources Director, who spear-headed the campaign asked all HR Business Partners at FGW to be innovative about how we could incorporate the revitalised policies into staff’s everyday work – ensuring they were understood and acted on.

As part of the campaign, the team produced a hard-hitting DVD about bullying and harassment at work illustrating unacceptable behaviours. Laura Cole, HR Business Partner, Employee Engagement and Reward at FGW explains: *“The film is really extreme and the reasons we went for extremes is because sometimes it is difficult to pick up on the subtleties of harassment.”*

The new policy, ‘Respect and Dignity at Work’ and a corresponding campaign ‘Together We Can Stamp It Out’ was gradually rolled out within the organisation. Line managers were trained on the new framework, attending a one-day training course covering all aspects of harassment and bullying, dealing with claims and linking them with the respect and dignity procedure and policy. Rhys continues: *“The managers went through a full day’s training course which they never had before, and it was very interactive, very live.”*

A total of 650 managers attended the training workshops. Colleagues were recruited from across the company and trained to facilitate two- hour workshops to the non-management workforce. Laura adds: *“The film would spark discussion, the facilitator would pick up issues from the film and ask them to consider what was ok and wasn’t ok to say at work, the aim being to make colleagues consider their audience rather than expecting no banter to occur at all.”* At the briefing sessions, employees were encouraged to discuss issues they didn’t like or found offensive.

About 90 per cent of the colleagues have now been through the workshops. Feedback from employees across the company has been very encouraging with almost 78 per cent of employees responding positively to the statement- ‘the company believes it is important that employees are

treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their position or background” in their most recent employee engagement survey (October 2014) The number of serious grievances and employee tribunal claims per annum has also reduced.

Leadership

The senior leadership team at First Great Western plays an important role in implementing innovative organisational practices for the benefit of the workforce. Mark Hopwood, the Managing Director, and Sharon Johnston, the HR Director, play a vital part in taking forward the “Together We Can Stamp It Out” campaign.

Rhys says: *“Mark and Sharon are really selling and pushing the ‘Respect and Dignity at Work’ piece. All of the executive team members went on the training course and they have really bought into what we are trying to do and achieve. The whole executive team have given their backing to the campaign, and it has also been nominated for a number of external awards.”*

Rhys also believes that Sharon’s non-directive style of leadership has helped the team to come up with novel policies to tackle discrimination in the workplace. *“We couldn’t have done it without the support of the leadership team, particularly Sharon. She gave us the freedom to go off and be creative about it [Respect and Dignity at Work campaign]. She did not tell us to do it a certain way. It was actually – this is over to you guys, go and create something”* he said.

Engaging a Diverse Workforce

First Great Western believes that having a diverse workforce is extremely important to the organisation.

Frances Williams, Head of Employee Engagement & Reward at First Great Western was recruited by the company in 2011 to increase employee engagement and boost customer service performance.

Laura explains:

“Frances came in as our first ever Engagement Manager in 2011 and did a lot of work with our colleagues to find out what it was they wanted and what FGW could do to make them feel more valued and appreciated in the workplace.”

This resulted in Frances organising focus groups for managers and employees to help everyone understand what the issues were and to get their buy-in to engagement initiatives.

Frances played a key role in strengthening the impact of the ‘Your Voice’ survey, which measures employee engagement at FGW to obtain data for managers to help them to understand how their colleagues feel about the company. She also put in place a comprehensive set of recognition tools for managers including the ‘Thank You’ and ‘Well Done’ cards and ways to recognise colleagues’ achievements instantly enabling managers and colleagues to recognise good work in a timely and effective manner. FGW also has an annual ‘Excellence Awards’ night, where individual colleagues and teams are recognised for exceptional work by their managers and peers.

FGW has a process which recognises the service that colleagues have given to the company and includes members of the family in the celebrations.

Rhys explains: *“We give them the day off work to attend a lunch with their partner or whoever they want to bring. These lunches are hosted by a member of the Executive team, and their local manager*

gives a presentation recognising the individual's career. They are given certificates, pin badges and gifts to recognising the milestone they are achieving, be it 20, 30, 40 or 50 years' service."

Laura also adds that a lot of their colleagues work odd hours and often get stuck on trains, and family support can have quite an impact on an employee's life, so any opportunity to thank the family is encouraged at FGW.

Challenges

Laura and Rhys believe that one of the major challenges for FGW is to establish sustained and effective communication mechanisms with all of their staff, and keep them informed about new policies and practices that all link to colleague engagement.

Laura says: *"It's about communication. A lot of our colleagues don't have a work email address. So how do we communicate with them? How do we get the messages and information we want them to receive to them in a way they take notice of?"*

Rhys adds: *"It's about being absolutely, as much as we possibly can, upfront and honest with colleagues, because I think if you are, then you engage with them and engagement will stabilise as a result of that."*