

## case study

### Royal Caribbean: engaging with its people to create a very different cruise experience for its guests

Royal Caribbean International provides its guests with a cruise to remember pushing the boundaries of onboard facilities including rock-climbing, surf simulators and ice-rinks and encouraging holidaymakers to experience some of the more unexpected excursions it offers such as glacier-trekking or cave-tubing.

But the ships and the destinations alone do not achieve its aim to be a very different type of cruise line. Royal Caribbean International recognises that, when it comes to creating a unique holiday experience, it is the delivery of the service by friendly, engaging and committed people that makes the company what it is today and so looks to recruit – and retain – people that 'go the extra mile' for the guests.

#### Getting to know what is important to the team

As part of its initiative to both listen to and understand what is important to the people that work for Royal Caribbean Cruise Liners, a division of Royal Caribbean International, it has embarked on a programme to survey its people on a regular basis. The survey has become part of the annual planning cycle and is seen by the staff as a valued opportunity to feed their thoughts and ideas into the management team.

"The engagement surveys go well beyond simply taking a health check of how our teams understand what we as a company want to achieve – and their role in delivering this," explains Helen Quinlivan, International Training Manager at Royal Caribbean International and Celebrity Cruises. "They know that they have a significant role in shaping the direction of the development planning – equipping them with the skills, the environment and the necessary tools to achieve our plans – and the survey is the vehicle that gives them the opportunity to influence this."

#### Getting started

Initially, the engagement survey was used to encourage employees to feel involved and positive

about changes that were taking place at the time of a new organisational structure being created, and also to provide a benchmark against which to measure as new initiatives were introduced.

Royal Caribbean International appointed Getfeedback to conduct an engagement survey to identify what employees were – and were not – happy with. Getfeedback produced a survey to achieve this and employees were invited to complete it online over just a three day period.

#### An engaged workforce

Although most surveys only attract a 60 percent response rate, 85 per cent of invited Royal Caribbean International employees took part in the initial survey, demonstrating a very strong commitment to, and interest in, having their views heard in this way. Indeed, this is something that has been built on over the past four years of surveys.

#### Surveying online

Running the survey online has proved to be easy to implement. Royal Caribbean International works with Getfeedback to design the survey each time, choosing the areas on which to focus based on the current situation. The survey is then constructed and web-enabled for the Royal Caribbean International employees to access and complete online. At any time, the team in Royal Caribbean can view the completion status of the survey.

#### The results – and using the feedback

The survey is carried out anonymously across the entire workforce and the results analysed both at a regional and a country unit level.

"This is important to us. We want to understand our people across the entire organisation and to ensure that they are fully supportive and engaged with our vision and where we see the organisation heading," says Quinlivan.

## case study

“But we also know that there are very different issues facing our people in different locations and so we reflect this in the reporting of the results. For example in the UK where we have a relatively large workforce, the issues raised may be around the opportunities for career development and movement within the organisation. However, in smaller teams the emphasis may be more on specific personal development.”

Quinlivan then invests in a communications programme to ensure all employees understand the results of the survey and what will happen next. This is typically done by cascading the information through the management team via email, presentation and conversation. As part of the people-issue planning, smaller teams are then encouraged to feed into the ideas and planning stages of how to address the issues raised by the survey.

### **Trends over the years**

For the past four years, Royal Caribbean International has surveyed annually its people. “It’s interesting to see the changes in the types of topics fed back to us and I believe this reflects the investment we have made in both putting in place new initiatives or refining those we already have,” Quinlivan comments.

“When we first started to survey our employees, people suggested that we should look at introducing additional healthcare benefits, linking pay to performance, reviewing annual holiday entitlement and turning a UK office into a common room for people to use during breaks. We worked on these and, now that these practical, hygiene-factor areas have been reviewed, comments now seem to focus on ‘softer’ areas such as increasing the opportunities to grow within the organisation and the style of management. In a way, the issues that we find highlighted by the more recent surveys are more sophisticated in nature.”

“One of the most positive things to emerge from the survey is the reporting of the pride our employees have in what we do and sell to our guests, as well as simply pride in working for the company. We find there is a great sense of commitment to the organisation, with people consistently ‘going the extra mile’. Of course, while all organisations would like to tap into the discretionary effort that employees can offer, we are very aware that this must not be exploited and whilst we have a committed and engaged team, we work hard

to promote a balanced working environment,” concludes Quinlivan.

### **Looking forward**

For the coming year the focus is on investing in staff training and motivation. “It’s an exciting time for us: despite the current economic downturn that is impacting many areas of business, we are experiencing some very positive trends in cruise bookings. On top of this, we are due to launch what will be the biggest ship in the world later this year,” says Quinlivan.

Royal Caribbean is proud of its people that deliver a very different cruise experience and is proud of its commitment to the engagement survey. “We know that traditionally busy managers spend most of their time focusing on those people who are at either end of the performance spectrum, but we need to make sure that the remaining, and of course this is the majority, employees are listened to and fully on board with our strategy and their role.”