

Case Study 2019

Elizabeth Akass
Editor



Daniel Thwaites
**Transforming employee engagement
through leaders and company culture**

Published by
engage
business media

Transforming employee engagement through leaders and company culture

Daniel Thwaites explains how it significantly improved its employee engagement and retainment on a budget through investing in culture and leaders.

Founded in 1977, the family-owned, multi-faceted hospitality business, Daniel Thwaites, is best known for its brewery, but also has over 20 hotels and inns, and over 240 tenant-leased pubs across the UK. It employs a small number of brewers within its staff of 1,600, and the own-brand ale they make is exclusively sold in Daniel Thwaites properties. The company is also known for its shire horses, which historically were used to deliver ales to local pubs in the Blackburn area, and now are famous for making appearances at Daniel Thwaites properties nationally.

Joanne Carlin, Director of People and Development at Daniel Thwaites, says although the company was in a good financial position when she joined in 2016, due to recently selling the Beer Co., it did have a high employee turnover rate of 62%, and in the previous year the business had “effectively stood still”, which both required immediate change. “I think it’s fair to say that we’d been so focused on the financial side and selling the Beer Co. that we hadn’t really paid as much attention to the health of the people turnover. That needed some serious thought.”

She also notes that, at the time, the three different strands of the business – the head office and brewery, the hotels, and the inns – all operated completely separately and there was no communication or cross-over of staff between them.

Carlin explains what she was brought in to achieve. “My remit was quite a simple one, and it was that we wanted to grow our business to acquisition, and we wanted to invest in our current properties to make the most of what we had.”

“We needed to grow our business by six properties in a 12-month period. One of the first things that I did in the first 30 days was just to really ensure I understood how many people we would need, and when we would need them by. We needed to grow; we had committed the funds to buy the new properties, and the people strategy needed to be realistic and reflect that.” She also describes the arduous nature of the hiring process at the time, taking “in excess of 60 days to fill a post”, which wasn’t sustainable in the fast-paced hospitality industry, and also needed rethinking.

A strategy for change was created. “I looked at five things: ‘brilliant basics’, ‘having a future for organisation’, meaning did we have the right people at that time in the right roles with the right skills, ‘leadership and capability’, we needed our leaders to be people-focused and to lead with both heart and mind to capture our team members, and ‘talent attraction and retention’.”

Realistically, however, although implementing all five pillars equally was ideal, Carlin and her team knew prioritising was vital to achieve their objectives within the set 12 month period. “We knew we had to pick the 20% of things that were going to have an 80% impact. We decided to focus on culture and leaders.” Which proved a success.

Carlin believes that “innovation happens bottom up”, so she ran 58 workshops to discuss ideas and gain feedback from over 900 Daniel Thwaites employees. “They are going to hold the answers to most of the questions you’re asking yourself as a business. However, you’ve got to make sure you’re asking the right questions, and you’ve got to be brave enough to listen to the answers.”

This resulted in 2,500 notes of feedback from employees. “We asked them what they thought the values of the business should be, and what they would like them to be. What

they thought we were great at, and what they thought we were not great at. What they loved; what they didn't love." This led to the company's new guiding principles. Carlin says these have been embraced successfully by employees because they were involved in building and designing them. "Our team members own them, and they love them for that."

She says it was also clear at Daniel Thwaites that the right leader was a "catalyst for potential success". To gain an inside perspective on the best attributes, skills, experience, and behaviours needed in these leaders, further feedback workshops were run for the general and senior managers from all divisions of the business across the UK. "We tried to get them to think about what they would want in a manager in a way in which was both self-reflective of their own management style, but also allowed them to reflect on how they are currently being managed." The information gained in these sessions became the foundation of Daniel Thwaites' new pillars and leadership programme.

Carlin describes the four main pillars of the leadership programme: "Leading people, leading change, leading business, and coaching and mentoring." She continues: "part of these pillars was to look at buckets of skills, as they call them, so we looked at three buckets of skills which fit into these: technical skills, commercial acumen, and behavioural skills, and then frame what we actually need from a leader and a general manager."

She also highlights the importance of evolving your thinking as you develop a deeper understanding of the business, and being open to changing your strategy or language if something isn't working as it should. Over time, the leadership academy was developed into three stages, and programmes were re-named where appropriate to enhance their success-rate or become more inclusive to invite employees from a wider range of levels in the business to take part. When apprenticeships aren't used, Daniel Thwaites will utilise "modules or a series of workshops, or employees can get involved in cross-functional project work."

Through developing language over time, the 'general manager of the future' programme became the 'emerging leaders' talent programme to appeal to all employees who wanted to advance their careers or develop in their current roles; most apprenticeships became 'career pathways' to appeal to a wider range of ages. The 'leading millennials' module became 'leading through the generations' to reflect the change in teaching leaders that they needed to "adapt their own style in order to lead the generations, as opposed to those people adapting to them. That was quite a seismic shift in thinking for them." Carlin says this proved a huge success.



Joanne Carlin,

Director of People and Development,
Daniel Thwaites

"The other thing that had a significant impact is coaching and mentoring, and giving our line managers at all levels the ability to flex their style, and flex the way they ask people for things." Carlin says that this has created a positive ripple effect, which is one of the most significant achievements of the company over the past three years. "You can see it. You get feedback from people and it just grows and grows because people pay it forward. If you have a line manager that's able to have better conversations with you, then when you become a supervisor or team leader by default you're going to have better conversations with your staff."

Since these changes have been implemented, the employee turnover rate has reduced by 10%, which is particularly significant in the hospitality industry.

Additionally, the ability to be flexible and adaptable whilst thinking ahead and progressing is also now firmly imbedded in the company culture. "We are constantly evolving, and we're definitely going to start using our career pathways and our academies externally. We have proved it works, and now we need to feel secure in that and tell people coming into the business about our academies and apprenticeships, and all of the ways we can develop and grow them as individuals in Daniel Thwaites."

"We don't leave any stone unturned; we're quite happy getting into the difficult situations that hospitality, and potentially other sectors, find themselves in at certain times. We think, let's just be honest about what our problems are, and always find a way forward."

engage

CUSTOMER

The Team

EDITORIAL

Steve Hurst
Editorial Director
steve.hurst@ebm.media
01932 506 304

Elizabeth Akass
Editor
lizzie.akass@ebm.media
01932 302 113

MARKETING

Katie Donaldson
Marketing Manager
katie.donaldson@ebm.media
01932 506 302

Sophie Smith
Marketing Executive
sophie.smith@ebm.media
01932 302 112

SPONSORSHIP

Dominic Stone
Sponsorship Sales
dominic.stone@ebm.media
01932 506 303

Dale Ayliffe
Sponsorship Sales
dale.ayliffe@ebm.media
01932 302 110

Dan Moran
Sponsorship Sales
dan.moran@ebm.media
01932 506 303

Pascal Van Huffel
Sponsorship Sales
pascal.vanhuffel@ebm.media
01932 506 308

MEMBERSHIP

Jamie Ross
Delegate Sales
jamie.ross@ebm.media
01932 506 306

Michael Duckham
Delegate Sales
mike.duckham@ebm.media
01932 506 307

FINANCE

Sabrina Clarke
Finance Manager
finance@ebm.media
01932 500 103

Jenna Pollard
Accounts Executive
accounts@ebm.media
01932 428 542

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Nick Rust
nick.rust@ebm.media
01932 506 301

Case Study 2019

Daniel Thwaites

Transforming employee engagement through leaders and company culture