




HAPPY TRAVELLER --- HAPPY EMPLOYEE

10 Travel Perks To Improve Retention And Recruitment

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Attracting and Keeping Good Staff

Happiness and loyalty go hand in hand for most employees. So do the variety and recognition many of those employees feel when they're sent away on business.

Yet, business travel is often an underused bargaining chip when it comes to improving staff satisfaction, or indeed attracting new people.

As part of this short e-guide for HR managers, we'll look at how an increasing number of organisations now consider flexible travel policies to be an essential workplace benefit. We'll discuss how applying a millennial mindset towards business travel enables you to dramatically improve how your current and future employees feel about working in your organisation.

We'll also highlight a number of attractive travel benefits you can consider - perks to help you create an organisational brand and culture that attracts good employees and keeps them happy.



Perk 1

Travel incentive programmes

Travel incentives are not just a great way to boost staff morale. They can also be a great PR tool for strengthening your brand among new recruits. The traditional approach of ferrying your staff to a company conference somewhere closeby to be talked at for two days are changing. From yoga wellness retreats in Ibiza and volunteering opportunities in Kenya, to private chartered planes or an all-inclusive, five-star stay in Cancun, a growing number of companies are using the uniqueness of their travel incentive programmes as a way to bolster their reputation as a very attractive place to work.

Recruitment

It can be a challenge to attract and retain good quality staff in times of low unemployment and a growing economy. In the current sellers market, it's therefore not surprising that more than half of all workers rank perks and benefits among the top criteria for deciding whether to accept a job.

According to a recent Booking.com survey, almost one third of employees accepted their job in part or fully because of the travel opportunities it offered. The survey also found that more than one third of all professionals would actively pursue another job if it meant they could travel more for work - a figure that rises to 46 percent among 18-34 year olds.^[1]

Perk 2 Travel rewards

More and more organisations are now using travel allowances as a way to keep existing staff happy and motivated, or indeed lure new ones. Travel rewards are increasingly becoming an accepted replacement for handing out cash bonuses as rewards for exceptional performance. Airbnb, for example, gives its employees an annual stipend of \$2,000 to travel and stay in any Airbnb listing anywhere in the world. Snowboard producer Burton does something similar by providing its employees with free seasonal ski passes.

Meanwhile, a 2017 report by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) showed that one third of travel managers saw an increase in enquiries about travel policy from candidates in the last 12 months.^[2]

Perhaps most tellingly, according to data from US employer review site Glassdoor, almost four in five employees would prefer new or additional benefits such as travel perks over a pay increase. That number goes up even more for women (80 percent) and younger employees (89 per cent).^[3]



Perk 3

Career sabbaticals

Although still relatively rare in most companies, milestone career sabbaticals are increasingly seen as a great staff retention tool, with around 17 percent of US companies now offering them. They reward long-serving employees with the opportunity - sometimes paid - to take a limited time off work to pursue other interests. Deloitte, for example, offers its staff an unpaid one-month sabbatical period which can be taken for any reason. It also offers a three- to six-month sabbatical at 40 percent pay which can be taken to pursue any personal, travel or professional growth opportunity.

Staff retention

More than three quarters of all business travellers in the US, Asia and Europe feel that their experience of business travel influences their overall job satisfaction - a figure that peaks to 88 percent for millennials.

According to ACTE, travel policy is increasingly becoming a part of the talent acquisition agenda. Almost 30 percent of all travel managers are now reporting that travel policy satisfaction is a significant or growing issue in employee retention.

A similar proportion says they have received requests from HR or other colleagues to make exceptions to existing travel policy, specifically linked to retaining certain members of staff.^[4]

With business travel so intrinsically linked to job satisfaction, any employer looking to attract and retain the best talent should consider travel as an essential part of the package on offer.



Perk 4

Paid holiday leave

Paid holiday leave varies hugely from company to company and indeed nationally. In countries such as Austria and Portugal employees take on average 35 days leave each year, in sharp contrast with the US where workers after five years service take on average 15 days. Paid leave can be an effective draw or retainer for existing or future staff, provided you allow some flexibility such as rolling over some of the unused paid vacation leave or having a cash-out option in place.

Millennials setting the tone

Though we're mindful not to overgeneralise about an entire generation, research shows that when it comes to workforce behaviour people born after 1982 - commonly referred to as millennials - share a number of common traits.

They're considered the first generation of 'digital natives' - tech savvy and hyperconnected employees who bring an altogether different attitude to the workplace. More than previous generations, they focus on a healthy work-life balance. To them, work is meant to be something more than just a paycheck: it's supposed to be fun.



Perk 5

Bleisure

More and more business travellers, especially millennials, add a couple of extra days to their business trips when possible. In fact, 78 percent feel more rewarded when they've been approved to take a bleisure trip. Accommodating bleisure may require you as an HR professional to be more agile when it comes to fulfilling your duty of care. One way of doing this is by extending your corporate travel risk policy to cover the additional bleisure days. In return for a more flexible policy you can expect less disruption with staff spending more frequent but shorter periods away from the office.

Interestingly, they're also the generation that blurs the lines the most between on and off time, taking work home and taking home to work. As marketing expert Scott Hess recently put it, 'Millennials see work and life as an integrated whole, reflective of an ongoing journey to find meaning and money, together'.^[5]

Younger employees use social media as their tool of choice for sharing travel (or indeed any) experiences with their tribes. Instagram in particular perpetuates a fear of missing out among their peers, often causing millennials to want to travel even more. Social media can therefore be a powerful branding tool, and a growing number of organisations are realising how sending their younger workers on exciting assignments away from the office can do wonders for their own PR.



More than half of travellers who take bleisure trips bring a family member or partner along. Millennials in particular are quite vocal when it comes to asking for additional travel benefits for their significant others. A number of companies are accommodating this by offering to pay for a hotel upgrade if their employee wishes to bring someone along. Some even offer to pay for the additional flights.

Redefining business travel

Millennials show a very different set of priorities and preoccupations from their older colleagues when they pack and go on business. This is a generation that loves to travel, having taken an average of 4.2 trips in the past year compared to 2.9 by the previous two generations. ^[6] More than anyone else, millennials structure their lives around experiences, rather than any other forms of compensation.

The upshot is that they're redefining business travel, travelling more frequently and spontaneously than their predecessors. Their desire to maximise their quality of life means that many in this age group choose to extend work trips with some extra leisure days - a concept known as 'bleisure'. They may even tag along their partner or a family member.^[7]



Perk 7

Sharing-economy services

Easily managed via a mobile device, the sharing economy is transforming travel on every level. Yet, many organisations are still trying to find ways to combine the flexibility provided by shared services with their duty-of-care and cost-efficiency requirements. You can score major points with your staff, however, if your HR policies, booking systems and travel programmes accommodate the convenience, speed and flexibility those services offer.

Millennials are also more inclined to use sharing economy services such as AirBnB, Lyft or Uber and are more likely to book outside their companies' travel policy.

From an operations and HR perspective, this poses a number of challenges with regard to duty of care obligations. One way to accommodate this is by keeping your policies under regular review and adding a degree of flexibility to your travel programmes.

Cost versus culture

It wasn't so long ago that business travellers were often referred to as 'road warriors', a not-so-subtle reference to the fact that they were expected to sacrifice their quality of life for the company's bottom line. It was the travel manager's main job to look at minimising the transactional cost of travel.

We're seeing an ongoing shift away from this transactional cost model towards a total cost model - one that also takes into account the human impact of travel. Most organisations now place at least an equally strong focus on employee satisfaction in their travel programmes as they place on cost minimisation.



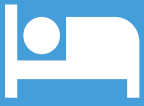
Perk 8

Rewards for policy compliance

Bookings made outside of policy can be a headache for travel managers and HR managers. Some companies offer cash incentives to encourage staff to use low-cost options and spend more carefully. Companies such as Google and Rocketrip allocate a budget for each business trip. When employees stay below budget, they earn credits which they can redeem for future travel upgrades or personal refunds.

This means that HR managers are now taking a much more active role when it comes to developing a supportive business travel culture, often working closely with travel managers in the operations team on initiatives that improve traveller experience.

Of course, the human cost of business travel is harder to measure than the financial cost. Yet many organisations - especially those that employ a majority of travellers under 30 - are now developing metrics for satisfaction, wellness and retention. This is a sensible move, given the number of recruits actively asking to look at their future employer's travel policy before making a decision.



Depending on which industry you work in, the thought of sharing a hotel room with a colleague might raise some eyebrows. Yet, it can be the norm in certain non-profit organisations or in academia. Some might see sharing accommodations with their co-workers as a good opportunity for bonding. However, we suggest at least offering employees the option to pay the difference for a private room. This way, you protect them from any possible discomfort.

A touch of flexibility

There simply is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to travel policy and culture. Your organisation may decide on a generous but strictly enforced policy, or a thrifty but informal one, or indeed any combination of those. Whichever policy it chooses, it will have an impact on employee recruitment and retention.

For HR managers, this often feels like walking a tightrope. On the one hand, policy is there to ensure safety, consistency and fairness across the board. On the other hand, there needs to be enough room to adapt to the needs of individual employees and roles.



Perk 10

Seven-year itch closure

This may be a perk too far for most organisations, but New York graphic design company Sagmeister & Walsh closes down its operations for one whole year every seventh year. A rather extreme form of a sabbatical, founder Stefan Sagmeister encourages his staff to look at it as an advancement on their retirement and use this gap year for 'creative rejuvenation'. From a recruitment and retention perspective, making your industry colleagues elsewhere green with envy is, of course, a nice bonus.

Some organisations choose basethat flexibility on seniority. Some choose a more standardised and egalitarian approach, often under pressure from younger and more junior business travellers who might otherwise feel left out. Other companies add flexibility based on the duration and purpose of the trip itself, with additional perks added depending on the reason for travelling.

Whichever way you go, today's workers expect at least some degree of flexibility.

Conclusion

Mostly driven by an articulate and tech-savvy younger generation of workers, the needs of modern business travellers continue to change. Given the ferocious competition across many industries, it's a good idea to keep your current workers motivated to stay by offering a set of attractive perks and incentives.

The same applies from a recruitment perspective. From paid time off and premium gym memberships to casual Fridays and sabbaticals, job seekers these days are actively playing future employers off against each other. Driven by a younger generation of workers generally more interested in a healthy work-life balance than monetary benefits, prospective employees are likelier to commit to an employer who's willing to meet them halfway.

Of course, standard employment perks and benefits are still important. However, travel perks offer an additional and (certainly in the long run) cost-effective way to keep your employees happy. They also allow you to brand your organisation as a great place to work, especially among younger workers.

[1] Booking.com - [News release](#)

[2] ACTE, [Managing the Modern Business Traveller](#), October 2017, p8

[3] Glassdoor, [Q3 2015 Employment Confidence Survey](#)

[4] ACTE, [Managing the Modern Business Traveller](#), October 2017, p9

[5] Adweek, [Entitled? Try Empowered: why millennials work the way they do](#), April 2016

[6] Adventure Travel Trade Association

[7] ACTE, [Meet the Modern Business Traveller](#), October 2016, p11

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