

HR director of the year

Winner

Kathryn Austin

chief people and marketing officer, Pizza Hut Restaurants



In 2010, when Austin joined, Pizza Hut was a brand in decline and hadn't had a profitable year since 2006. It's a different story now and Austin has been instrumental in its turnaround. In its final quarter of 2015 the chain reported nine consecutive quarters of growth, thanks to a strategy that puts people at its heart and the alignment of the internal and external, as exemplified by Austin's leadership of not only the HR, but also the marketing function.

As part of the leadership team, Austin has been involved in the private equity buyout of Pizza Hut Restaurants, during which it separated from its delivery business. To fund the next phase of its investment, Pizza Hut Restaurants is now on the market for a new owner, and Austin has involved employees in the process, using the company's Yammer platform to ask staff why potential investors should consider the Hut.

To drive growth, and make the organisation more attractive to investors, it is focused on training and development as much as refurbishment, taking a staged approach to both. Those

restaurants entering the third and final stage, which comes after refurbishment and focuses on driving people capability, typically see growth of more than 6%.

Austin is on a personal mission to elevate careers in the restaurant industry, so it is perceived as a place to learn and grow, and to this end Pizza Hut offers a number of traineeships and apprenticeships. Her team have contributed to the wider apprenticeship trailblazer groups and partnered with Manchester Metropolitan University to develop the UK's first CMI chartered apprenticeship degree in business management and hospitality.

A holistic approach to learning and wellbeing means the company is also partnering with Alain de Botton and his School of Life to introduce philosophy into the workplace. A voluntary programme of virtual content broadcast via internal social media has a fan base of more than 500 staff.

One of Austin's greatest fans is her CEO Jens Hofma, who says: "On a personal level Kath is a great leadership role model for HR – she generates high-octane positive energy with a curiosity to explore the potential of the unconventional."

But it's not just her fellow leaders who rate Austin's work, her employees do too. "She always believes in the best of everyone," one waitress says, while another adds: "Kath is an amazing individual, even the fact that as a waiter I know who she is and have had the pleasure to meet her says a lot."

Austin's achievements also impressed many of her HR director peers. "It's great

Finalists

Sharon Ashcroft
TrustFord

Karen Bowes
Capital One

Jean Cabena
Remploy

Sue Evans
Warwickshire County Council

John Greatrex
Unipart Group

Danielle Harmer
Metro Bank

Guy Pink
Addaction

Richard Summerfield
JT Global

Julie Welch
Wincanton

to see an HR person responsible for another area of the business and make a demonstrable contribution to business success," was one comment. Another described her as "an exemplar for HR", adding: "Practical, business-focused and incredibly innovative at the same time." "The way that the employee engagement and external marketing/customer service narratives have been woven together is exceptional," another commented.

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