

Best *learning and development* strategy

Winner Network Homes

In 2015 things were not going well at Network Homes. Employee survey results were, in the words of the housing association, 'dire', with staff feeling disengaged, undervalued and unappreciated. Customer satisfaction ratings were average at best, with the two clearly linked.

So it launched a new people and culture agenda, with the aim of unlocking discretionary effort in pursuit of first-class customer service. The HR team asked people what motivated them to do a great job. They responded that it was about having the right skills and confidence, and feeling valued and appreciated by their manager. Cue a lightbulb moment of realising that learning and development could unlock both.

In the same way an airline might have multiple routes, the team hit on the idea of an L&D strategy with a range of 'stops'. They provided staff with special HART passports (HART standing for hungry, accountable, respectful and together). The passport was designed to encourage staff to keep a record of their learning at each destination.

Shortlisted

Armstrong Ceiling Solutions

Be At One

British Heart Foundation

Dorchester Collection

Imperial Brands

J Murphy & Sons

Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution Care Company

The Berkeley Partnership

XPO Logistics

The first step was a three-year partnership with Mary Gobar International, which helped create consistent values-based behaviours. Then motivational guru Michael Heppell was enlisted to deliver snappy bitesize learning focusing on 'HARTS' – how to get better for yourself – and 'MINDS' – how to get better for your customers.

The HR team also realised that for many customers their first (and sometimes only) contact is through email and letters. This meant teaching everyone how to really BOSS (balanced, orders, spoke, snappy) their writing. For managers, the housing association introduced a ROCKSTAR leadership development programme. To keep budgets down, Network Homes identified five in-house experts to train up to co-facilitate alongside an MGI trainer.

Things ticked along nicely for two years. But in year three the tragic Grenfell Tower fire meant the organisation needed to urgently divert resources into fire safety and remedial building works (its residential blocks were clad in the same flammable material and built by the same contractors).



This aspect of the entry received particular praise from our judges, who said they liked how adaptable the strategy was.

In October 2018 the organisation achieved outstanding levels of employee engagement in its staff survey. Average sickness had reduced dramatically from 11 days (August 2015) to four days (January 2019), with a productivity saving of circa £450,000. This has all been reflected in customer satisfaction, which increased 12.5% from 79.2% (2015) to 89.1% (January 2019).

Our judges commented that they "thoroughly enjoyed" reading this entry, commenting that it had "a real buzz about it". "I'd like to work there," one judge commented. High praise indeed.

Highly commended

VHR

In January 2018 technical recruiter VHR implemented a bespoke nine-month training programme to transform eight individuals with no recruitment industry experience into successful consultants. The Academy trainees followed a core syllabus with training tailored to each individual. The firm specifically targeted those with second languages. Over the nine-month programme trainees were coached by all members of the VHR management and sales teams and met VHR clients, including a full tour of Virgin Atlantic's operations. Five of eight trainees exceeded performance targets in their first month. Two months into the second Academy, three trainees exceeded their performance targets. With the average cost of recruiting one new hire £3,000 and the cost of replacing an employee £11,000, VHR saves £14,000 for every employee recruited and retained. Our judges commented that there was a "really clear sense of what they wanted to achieve" with this strategy, and praised how "scalable" it was.