

Air NZ's Top 5 Strategies to Make Employee Experience Soar

5 Nov 2018



Air New Zealand recognises that what's on the inside shows up on the outside and that its success as NZ's most loved brand has been created by design and not accident.

But a burgeoning gap has been growing over the last few years between their customer experience and their employee experience, and it was having a detrimental effect on their people and business

performance.

"This gap was partly caused by our success – the success of our brand and reputation for great customer experience," says Marc Figgins who is GM People Revenue and Employee Experience at Air New Zealand. "When people join Air New Zealand, they expect a similar experience, and unfortunately we weren't quite meeting those expectations to the standard we wanted."

Figgins, who was speaking at [HR Innovation & Tech Fest](#), calls this the employee experience gap. While engagement levels are still quite high, (4.1 stars on Glassdoor and #1 most attractive employer by Randstad), this was not good enough for the airline which maintains a relentless focus on outstanding customer experience – it was imperative they were delivering the same or better experience for their people.

A new Employee Experience (EX) strategy was put in place to fix this gap. Here are Marc's top 5 tips for anyone looking to implementing a successful EX strategy in their own organisation:

1. Establish an EX Coalition

Having a single lens to view EX efforts through is essential to having a coordinated strategy, says Figgins. "The most critical first step was to bring together a cross organisational team of senior executives or influencers from the nine different HR functions to align and coordinate our efforts around EX." Their efforts are underpinned by three principles:

1. **Simplicity:** employee products should be simple to use and understand.
2. **Transparency:** Be more adult, open and trusting. Less policy and more guidelines.
3. **Tailored:** Built for the user, there's no such things as one-size-fits all.

2. Focus on Human-Centric Design

Where once they designed products and services in isolation, the team is now focusing on building product management and human-centric design capability into their employee products.

The organisation has shifted from centres of excellence to a more agile, product focused model. “Historically HR has designed products based on what we think we know best by listening to each other, and then we thrust it out there at people. This new approach is about finding out what employees want and actually designing it with them,” says Figgins.

HR teams are now encouraged to seek input and collaborate on product design to ensure employees are empathised with and that the end-product meets their user experience needs.

3. Tailor Experiences with Data

Air New Zealand acknowledges that a person’s needs, motivations and experiences are not defined by the job they do. Just as they do for their customers, Air New Zealand has developed six broad personas to create and communicate more personalised products and experiences for employees.

“We’re trying to move away from the Millennial, Baby Boomer segmentation, to thinking a bit differently about our people. These personas give us a new way of thinking about our people” says Figgins.

4. Know What Matters to Your People

Critical to any EX strategy is finding out what’s important to people. “We discovered its often not what you think that matters the most, and it often requires digging deeper than your organisation-wide engagement survey. Ultimately you need to hear more voices,” advises Figgins.

Air New Zealand have used a number of ways to do this including internal collaboration tools like Yammer and Teams, monitoring keywords on social media platforms, and more fact-to-face engagement from product managers to employees.

Also integral to gaining insight into employees was creating an employee journey map. Borrowing techniques from marketing and digital, the team mapped their employee journey, plotting the highs and lows of an Air New Zealand employee, and indicating the points that are going to provide the biggest employee delights.

5. Brand and Communicate your EX Efforts

“Creating a really compelling EX brand is essential to getting cut-through for your EX program, to show that you are listening and acting,” says Figgins. To do this, the team launched a number of EX brand initiatives including new digital collaboration tools, refreshed work spaces, and a complete overhaul of flexible working programs. They also made smaller changes like doing away with complex passwords, and creating an app that lets you steal meeting rooms that have been booked but not used.

“Our core product at Air New Zealand is service and so nothing is possible without engaged, motivated people who have a great experience at work,” Figgins concludes, “we put a relentless focus on our CX, and that CX only comes with exceptional EX.”

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