

IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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The mandate of real estate investment trust intu is simple: Provide customers with the best shopping centre experience possible by keeping staff as satisfied as possible. The logic, of course, is engaged employees result in happy customers.

With 2,600 staff (2,130 are in-house) employed in centres across the UK and also a growing presence in Spain, intu implements multiple strategies to improve the employee experience.

There are various platforms of engagement such as the staff intranet 'Mint', staff presentations, employee magazine 'Chorus', briefings and consultation forums 'Your Voice', as well as regular meetings, social events and fun days.

Then there are also opportunities for personal and professional development with mentorship schemes, innovation initiatives and experimental projects.

intu is also focused on building a diverse and inclusive workforce – 30 per cent of women occupy positions at broad, senior management or executive levels and there are 27 different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds in the workforce. The organisation also pays all of its employees over 18 that have passed probation the National Living Wage.

To top off all the perks is the Win Your Dream initiative, now in its third year, recognises and rewards employees for work well done. With three tiers of winnings, staff can earn a monthly, quarterly or annual prize – the last being a dream experience worth £10,000.

The results are impressive: 84 per cent of staff say they're proud to work for intu, employee engagement scores rank around 750 out of 1,000 and staff turnover has dropped by 18 per cent overall in the past four years.

Best practice learning points

- Pay the National Living Wage;
- Provide a clear induction policy explaining the brand to all employees;
- Where possible, bring your team in-house. Of the 2,600 employees, 2,130 are employed in-house;
- Provide multiple channels of communication to engage employees;
- Promote diversity and inclusion by actually employing a team that reflects these values; and
- Offer staff monetary rewards and opportunities for personal and professional development.

Starting position

With 2,600 staff employed in centres across the UK and increasingly Spain, employee teams are grouped into six core strands: asset management, digital & commercial, development, operations (including FM), finance, governance and support.

The bulk of the staff, 2,130 employees, are employed as in-house frontline shopping centre staff through intu Retail Services, which provides fully integrated facilities management. The HR and learning and development teams are also in-house.

The goal was to provide shopping centre customers with an enhanced experience that catered to needs beyond the merely transactional. Instead, the focus was creating a space in which visitors could fulfil their social and functional needs.

The decision was made that the best way to ensure customers receive their best experience was to create an engaged employee experience for all of intu's staff.

Action taken

It starts when all employees, regardless of seniority, undergo a thorough brand immersion process to instil the brand values – bold, creative and genuine – that drive the business.

However, brand communication does not end at induction and systems have been put in place to ensure these brand values are realised.

The Ideas Funnel solicits creative ideas from staff, while the Accelerate and Green Lab initiatives allow space to experiment with boldness.

Employee engagement is a big part of enhancing the employee experience and this happens through various channels including the intranet 'Mint', staff presentations, the employee magazine 'Chorus', briefings and consultation forums 'Your Voice', as well as regular team meetings or 'huddles', annual roadshows, and social events and fun days.

To reflect the diversity of the various visitors to its shopping centres, intu wanted a diverse and inclusive workforce and set about doing so.

Other policies intu has implemented include:

- Compliance with the Equality Act Gender Pay Gap Information;
- Ending zero-hour contracts and paying the National Living Wage;
- An apprenticeship scheme (now in its third year);
- Leadership development schemes;
- Updated performance appraisal systems;
- Regular CSR opportunities for staff and the wider community; and
- The Win Your Dream employee reward scheme.

Final position

Winners of the Investors in People gold award, intu's commitment to employees and their role in the business has been recognised by the industry. Additionally, company-run surveys reveal 84 per cent of staff say they're proud to work for intu.

With a largely in-house team staff retention has been high. The FM function, also in-house, has seen a drop from 35 per cent to 19 per cent in staff leaving within first year, while overall turnover dropped by 18 per cent and staff absence reduced by 15 per cent.

With regards to intu's diversity and inclusion goals, there are 27 nationalities and ethnic backgrounds in its workforce and 30 per cent of women employees occupy board, senior or executive management level roles.

The company also provides mentorship schemes to women and work experience for students from less traditional backgrounds.

Other employee development schemes, under the direction of the talent development manager, include a 12-month leadership programme for succession planning with eight candidates passing through it last year as well as the third year of the apprenticeship scheme underway with nine recruits in 2018.

The HR department has also recruited 54 positions internally so far in 2018

CSR is also a major priority at intu with staff having given 28,000 hours to the communities in which the centres operate. Specifically, the Green Gyms project, to which intu has contributed for a decade, and with the help of staff and 1,000 volunteers, has devoted 80,000 hours to planting trees and gardening plots. Those involved have reported a 21 per cent increase in happiness.

Finally, Win Your Dream, also in its third year, has rewarded 1,000 employees for making people smile. Each month, the programme awards the winning employee with a golden envelope containing £100 gift card. The reward also offers three quarterly £1,000 gifts and, once a year, a lucky employee wins a prize worth £10,000 to make their dream come true.

The judges said...

This entry demonstrated the link between intu's exemplary customer service and the behaviours of frontline FM employees who are fully engaged with its culture and objectives. intu can evidence continual improvement in terms of employee engagement, generated through initiatives that are clearly valued by its people. It has Investors in People Gold status for all of its UK shopping centres, and its people-centric approach shines from its employee testimonials and from the commitment at board level.