



Aug. 12, 2014, Panel Discussion

Moderator: Elizabeth Brown, Trulia VP of HR

Panelists:

Corey Barker, Medallia Director of Growth and Development

Emily Couey, Eventbrite Head of People

Greg Pryor, Workday VP of Leadership and Organization Effectiveness

Beth Steinberg, BrightRoll SVP of People

Our participants met to discuss a range of topics, including how to effectively position a human resources department as a business partner in the company. They also explored using employee feedback and social media, and building learning into the organization through hiring and onboarding. Below are some key takeaways from the discussion.

How do you stay relevant?

Beth Steinberg: I align myself very closely with the business as a partner. I don't see myself as being any different than anybody else sitting at the table. My job is to add value to the business. We try to get a lot of feedback and input from the entire organization.

Emily Couey: For us, it's not just about helping people be better at their jobs, but to develop them as full individuals. In our onboarding process, we send people out on a self-selected challenge exercise to push them mentally, physically or emotionally. They come back, and we talk about the difference that they've realized by opting in to that zone of discomfort. We found that people open the aperture, learn amazing things about themselves, and broaden their perspective on the world and how to work with others.

How have you gone about collecting feedback to make sure you're adding the right value?

Couey: To be a high-performing organization, we entered into high-performance feedback loops. We started doing a 20-question culture poll on a quarterly basis and shared that feedback in a very transparent way with the organization. We're currently at our third iteration, with our survey a bit longer. We also partnered with our customer service department to launch a monthly Breitling Net Promoter Score (NPS) to get the real-time pulse of how the organization is feeling in terms of recommending Eventbrite as a great place to work to a friend or family member. It helps us to be proactive rather than reactive to what everybody needs.

Corey Barker: We track employee NPS through our biannual surveys and get gut checks from employees on a regular basis. It's what you do with the feedback that matters. We just went through an employee survey and reviewed the results as a "people and culture team." We talked about what we need to be doing differently. How are we doing as a group? What are the areas that we can improve? We are being very thoughtful about the feedback and tweaking things so we can improve in the right ways. Ultimately, it's about the experience that people are having.

How have you gone about leveraging social media in either your HR or Learning and Development programs?

Steinberg: We now are a global organization and wanted to find ways to get messages out there and engage people around concepts. The most interesting thing we've gotten out of social media is building a platform for people to share stories and collaborate. We're hearing from our culture survey that people want to know where the career opportunities are. We're thinking about how we can use video—with people and their stories already in our organization—to help spur others to get out there and look for those opportunities. We also use Google+ as a venue where people get together and form groups to talk about different topics. There's a lot of organic learning and development going on.

Greg Pryor: We're using social media to embrace user-generated content. At Workday, we encourage people to put their information on LinkedIn, where we can pull up all those skills and experiences so everyone can see it. It's really about stepping out of the conduit role of HR and moving into the curator role: You enable people to generate their own content and share it broadly in whatever form.

What are your thoughts on making an impact as a partner to the business?

Pryor: Always begin with the outcome. We are intentionally not a Learning and Development team, but a Leadership and Organization Effectiveness team. We frame everything in the context of the outcome rather than the activity and then decompose an opportunity and ask, "What are the things that we would want to do to achieve that outcome?" Another thing is to always think about branding: What is the brand and the brand personality? Do we want our people to show up in a certain way? The brand is reflected in how we select people and the environment we create.

Any best practices about bridging the gap between hiring and onboarding?

Barker: We have both technical and cultural interviews. It can be easy—when you're in that spot of pain and you need someone on the team—to say, "That person meets the technical requirements: Let's bring them in for the job." Once you compromise, your standard drops. Keeping the bar high is really important. We're in the process of putting everyone through an onboarding process so people understand that we want them to have a mindset of being owners in the business. That then translates to how they interact with each other. About 90 percent of our senior leaders—including the president of the company—have gone through the process.

How do you differentiate the career experience of your employees from your competitors?

Couey: It's our aspiration to not be just a happy place to work, but also a really high-performing organization. So we entered into high-velocity feedback loops to make sure we know how our employees feel about Eventbrite. I set the bar for my team and myself that what we deliver is what our business is delivering to our customers. We want to have a system for our employees that is as cutting edge, as thoughtful and as high quality as what we ship to our customers.

Steinberg: I'm trying to build programs around skills and competencies rather than jobs. I've asked people to stop for a minute and think about what they want to learn and what skills we should be teaching them to help them get to the next level. We're starting an emerging-leaders program for high-potential people so they can be ready. These would be people who will be taking on the responsibility of managing people who come in over the next six to 12 months. We also augment these with great lunch-and-learns and speaker series.

Barker: When I first started at Medallia, we were looking at building our onboarding program. One of the values we wanted to articulate is to embrace a growth mind-set—which includes a focus on continuous learning and being willing to challenge status quo—to push yourself, and if you don't know something, you're going to challenge yourself to learn it. I can't express about how important it is to align values and help people understand how their personal values come out in the organizational values and how they hopefully are connected.