Change Loading...

Getting buy-in for your new travel policy

Change is scary.

And after the last year or so, you've probably had all the change you can handle. But change can also be a good thing, especially if it streamlines processes, boosts efficiency, saves money and improves health and safety.

The challenge? Getting your team onboard.

Implementing a new workplace system requires staff buy-in to succeed, which is often trickier than it sounds.

New business travel policies often come up against stiff resistance, either because people are comfortable with how things 'have always been done' – or a traveller has to accept a loss of loyalty status or the ability to book how (and where) they like. And sometimes, we're just stuck in our ways.

The truth is COVID-19 has changed travel for the foreseeable future. Travel policies will need to be revised and updated to meet the challenges of a post-pandemic world. But how can you ensure the process is as smooth as possible? Without ruffling too many feathers along the way? Enter change management.

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What is Change Management?

If you listen to the experts, change management is "the process of preparing, equipping and supporting individuals to successfully adopt change to drive organisational success and outcomes". That's the clever description US-based change management consultancy, Prosci, has come up with.

In simpler terms: change management focusses on the 'people side of change'. It prepares and supports individuals to actually embrace change (believe it or not!) for the overall benefit of the company.

Successful change management combines leadership, psychology, empathy and a people-first approach.

What does it mean for your business travel programme?

No one wants to be the bad cop. Or carry a big stick. A smooth transition to a new travel policy needs open, upfront communication; the sharing of objectives; and a clear understanding of the downside of non-compliance.

Changing a business travel programme usually consists of the following:

- Creating and rolling out a new travel policy.
- Implementing new technology .
- Introducing new booking and approval processes.

All these elements require engagement and action from the entire team. The implementation process also requires day-to-day management to minimise non-compliance after rollout.

Reassure your team throughout the change. Preference, comfort, convenience and safety are top of mind when they're travelling for business. They'll feel disappointed (even put out) if they can no longer fly with their preferred airline or if accommodation budgets change. Make it clear that you share their concerns, and that the changes will be to their benefit.

All in!

Introducing your new travel policy

It's tough at the top. Organisational changes, such as to your travel programme and policies, require a clear vision. A good leader or manager will not only communicate this vision – they will ensure that all their employees understand the vision and how it is linked to the planned change.
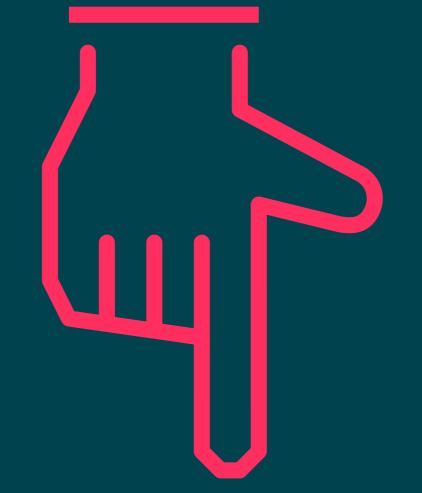
A successful change leader will then turn this vision into a practical action plan, while never losing sight of the people affected. Whew. But it can be done, even when you have a diverse range of ages and personalities in the mix.

The demographic divide

Change management is important in today's multi-generational workforce. Business travel programmes are being updated to respond to new trends and maintain relevance for younger, often more tech-savvy users. So, while incoming generations, with different sets of expectations, priorities and behaviours, drive many of these changes in the workplace — they also respond to change differently.

Before making a host of changes to your travel policy, it is important to understand how to communicate and build trust with the different demographics in your organisation. Empathy is key here. Research conducted by Canadian recruitment agency Robert Half, shows that communication skills, the ability to adapt to change and tech skills are the top three areas where generations differ the most in the workplace.

Generations X and Y often view change "as a vehicle for new opportunities", while Gen Z simply "is accustomed to change and expects it in the workplace". Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are more reluctant and cautious when it comes to change. Consider approaches such as blended technology to help bridge the gap between generations with different technological preferences. Blended technology acknowledges the importance of human interactions (e.g. between the traveller and agent or consultant) amidst this new age of innovation and technology. Designing a change that achieves balance such as this will help to make your employees, no matter their age or experience, feel heard and considered.

Resistance is Futile
3 steps for effective change management

1. Design

What do you want to achieve with your new travel programme? A professional Travel Manager will help you design a policy that meets your business objectives. One that helps you identify (and achieve) your top-level goals for your travel programme, including:

- spend reduction,
- more efficient booking processes,
- simpler cost reconciliation, and
- increased visibility over your expenditure.

Remember, saving money is just one objective. Creating efficiencies, reducing stress, and traveller safety are all essential components of a travel policy. Breaking down these components will help travellers better understand the changes afoot – and how following the policy is in their best interest.

Travel policies should also be flexible. For example, it can be important to allow people to go over budget if they have a good reason. VIP travellers need to be able to bypass certain requirements. Work with your travel implementation team to anticipate problems and formulate a strategy for rolling out the changes.

2. Deploy

Successful deployment of any change management strategy depends on three things: communication, communication, and communication.

Communicate your new policy throughout your business. Work alongside your travel implementation team to find the best ways to educate your staff, track progress, and celebrate success.

A common cause of traveller friction is a poorly-communicated rationale for change. And it' easy to avoid. Involve your team, discuss policy changes openly and often, and develop training on new booking systems and procedures. Change should never come as a surprise.

Other steps you can take include:

- Engaging with your travellers to identify those who will incur a loss in status or rewards as a result of the new policy.

- Take advantage of your Travel Manager's network to compensate staff who may lose benefits as a result of the changes. This can include perks such as airline lounge passes or individual concessions for higher booking classes.

- Tailor communication to affected travellers outlining the need for policy changes, the objectives for your new policy and any efforts the company is taking to alleviate losses in status and rewards.

Remember, no matter how practical or necessary, changes to your business travel programme will impact individuals in your organisation. Encouraging their input throughout the process will help to ease apprehension that can arise during this time of change.

3. Drive

Once you have implemented your new policy, you will need to drive and promote policy compliance. Check-in with your Travel Manager on how you are tracking against your objectives. They will be able to provide up-to-the-minute reporting, analyse where your policy is leaking, and suggest tactics to tackle non-compliance.

Identify and recruit key people in your organisation to help drive behaviour change. Obviously a clear, accessible and widely-distributed policy is important – but so is a dedicated team focussed on long-term success. Before you know it, your new policy will be old hat (and just as comfortable).

There is nothing permanent ... except change

But don't get too comfortable. Your travel policy should never be a static document. People and behaviours change. Trends and technology change.

Create a culture in which change is embraced and communicated as a catalyst for improvement. You should review your travel policies on a regular basis. Ensure that your employees have a platform to provide constructive feedback on your travel programme so that when change does occur, it is relevant, pertinent and effective.

Be sure to acknowledge any feedback received and work together with your team and your Travel Manager to determine how to best respond. Transparency throughout the process is essential. A successful travel programme relies on a strong, flexible and people-first travel policy.

HOTEL