

# REBUILDING, REBRANDING AND BECOMING THE BEST (WORKPLACE)

Nóra Szabó has been the human resources director at Granit Polus Group since September 2016. Responsible for HR strategy, organizational development, staffing, employee development, and performance management, among other things, she talks here about what it takes to build an award-winning workplace.



## What does it take to earn the Best Workplace Award?

In one word: commitment. AON Hewitt's methodology also lies in commitment. To run a program that fulfills this, the CEO needs also to be committed. I firmly believe that unless the upper management pays attention to the metrics of the Aon Hewitt Survey, including human-centered leadership, communication with colleagues, and a result-

and performance-oriented working environment, this program cannot be completed. What we have done to make our colleagues committed to this program is a different story.

## Terms such as commitment are overly used in human resources and it sometimes feels that they have ceased to be meaningful. What is behind the above achievement?

It is important to mention where we started from. Last summer, TPG bought a considerable part of the owners' assets. The period leading to the transaction was an exhausting, stressful one-and-a-half years for our colleagues, and resulted in both physical and mental fatigue. Part of the company left, which feels as if an organ was removed from one's body. The parting created a general bad atmosphere in the company; one-in-three people were looking for a job. Into this environment arrived our new CEO, a person who, fortunately, was sensitive to this and was the driver behind the change. The organization may have worked as a business, there were projects and a vision, but it lacked a team that could support them at a mental level.

## What did you do exactly?

The CEO gave us the mandate to create a plan that deals with the staff from all angles – from the professional and personal

development viewpoint. We were also asked to come up with ideas that help bring the team closer. For the former we modified fringe benefits: we eliminated the cafeteria system and added its gross equivalent to our colleagues' salary. This pays out in the short-term as well, but in the long run too – we tried to think with employers' heads and found this would be appreciated. We improved the language learning opportunities.

We were aware that the atmosphere could only improve with the creation of a real community. Yet, rather than suggesting what to do, we wanted to support what our colleagues come up with. There are a lot of creative people among the staff, many do sports and, despite the sector, half of our staff are women, who are interested in DIY. So, we announced we would support any grass-root ideas they initiate.

As a result, they created a sports team, a social responsibility team, and we discussed what they wanted to achieve. I had hardly anything to do with this; it was they who suggested the groups and elaborated the plans. Among the programs were a bike tour around Lake Velence and a canoe-trip; they took care of everything from stops to restaurants to having lunch. This was unprecedented in the previous organization.

## What was the overall aim of the program; employee retention?

In part, it was. But the root of this problem is always something else: according to studies, workforce migration is the result of conflicts with the direct supervisor. They are the main culprit for that – supervisors may expect too much, and don't appreciate employees or overlook the need of work-life balance, etc. In our case, the reason was not supervisors but the shock the transaction created. Our colleagues did not really intend to leave the firm – they wanted more to escape the bad atmosphere. That is why we had to deal with the general atmosphere, which, to a great extent, is defined by the direct supervisors. They paid extra attention to their staff – it was interesting to see the changes that took place as a result.

## Were they given training on how to deal with their colleagues?

It wasn't necessary. If the organization has transparent communication and the CEO is committed to provide extra dedication to the colleagues, all leaders will "line up" for that. Due to the size of the firm, information circulates easily, and we received similar feedback on people. Leaders were aware what was at stake. I obviously had a few discussions with leaders on certain people – if they need more attention or leeway – but nothing extraordinary.

## There has been growing emphasis on employee's needs lately. Is this a new phenomenon – the result of the current labor market conditions?

It takes a certain type of leader: nothing works unless they recognize the problem and are willing to change. The change of leadership at the firm last year brought along a CEO who is just like that. The labor market affects us – we unconsciously sense that, due to tight demand, we may have a more difficult time finding qualified workforce. Fluctuation has never really been a problem, though the young may be more likely to leave.

## Companies are said to be forced to somewhat adjust to the new generation of workers. Is it more difficult to retain the young?

More than 50% of young people taken on have found their place here and have been with us for more than a year. We should aim for that: if a young employee, aged 25-28, remains at a place for a year, they won't leave. If the youngsters are going to leave a firm, they do so within the first two to three months. They go and try new firms; why not? The market now allows them to do so. These are the people whose parents worked a lot but they do not want to live the same life. They are more reckless – but a larger number of them love their work and feel accomplished at our firm.

## In the new company, new posts have been created and some people were given more responsibility. What effect does this have on the organization?

The head of international relations and the head of finances are two new posts – both taken by women. Although it is the CEO who makes the final decision, he would ask them what they think of a certain move. Many CEOs believe they have to tell exactly what to do rather than asking for information. Asking questions is often regarded by CEOs as a weakness, even though a colleague may have more in-depth knowledge in a certain field. Colleagues feel more appreciated this way and their professional opinion may prove right

in the future. Their competence is something the CEO counts on. So overall, more responsibility equals more trust.

## Some large companies, such as Google, are not only recognized by their product; they are also famous for their working environment? Were HR aspects taken into consideration when rebuilding the brand?

The brand itself is more linked to the buildings the company has developed and these are the ones the colleagues are proud of. Employer branding was part of the 2017 vision – we gave equal emphasis to improving corporate ecosystem to the rest of the projects we dealt with.

I am also proud to say to a future employee that we have been on a canoe trip, that we prepare Christmas wreaths or chocolate at Szamos, or we have a corporate party, Göböl feszt, which employees look forward to. A company should grasp what, beyond strictly professional tasks, makes colleagues feel they are given more, which eventually makes them committed. It was when it was looking for the drivers behind sustainable business performance at companies that Aon Hewitt found employees' commitment is a key element.

Being proud of the brand, being appreciated and respected by fellow colleagues are ways that help commitment become stronger, and those employees who feel that will eventually become committed. This, however, is never without a purpose. The aim is that the business runs well and, to achieve that, we have to work together.



Photo: AtteKovacs Photography.