

## Health & Wellbeing

First ScotRail  
February 2009



### **EFA overview**

First ScotRail is the largest regional train operating company in the UK, covering the widest geographical spread - from Carlisle in the north of England to the Highlands of Scotland, 350 miles away.

It provides 95% of passenger rail services within Scotland and the Caledonian Sleeper services between Scotland and London with more than 81 million passenger journeys a year.

Over the past four years, First ScotRail has developed its people strategy with input from key stakeholders, including four trade unions. This work helped the business identify healthy ageing as a key concern in improving employee engagement.

### **Initiative**

First ScotRail introduced a people strategy that emphasised employee health and wellbeing.

### **Aims of initiative**

First ScotRail's health ageing initiative set out to address a range of issues that affected the health and wellbeing of an ageing, predominantly male workforce.

When the company took over the franchise in October 2004, musculoskeletal disorders and mental health problems were the main causes of sickness and absence. However, with an entrenched macho culture, ideas around a healthy lifestyle were not taken seriously.

However, as many families work for the business, First ScotRail decided its approach to workplace health should also take account of health lifestyles more generally.

### **Approach taken**

Working with trade unions, First ScotRail adopted a range of health measures. These included access to on-site massage and chiropody services for all staff, hypnotherapy to help smokers give up and in-house physiotherapy.

The business also launched a number of wellbeing campaigns. It registered for Scotland's Healthy Working Lives award, ran a number of Wellbeing Weeks and set up a personal health challenge. The latter involved hiring a personal trainer to develop fitness assessment and improvement plans for every employee who took part in the campaign.

In addition it has redirected its Employee Assistance Programme, opening it up to extended family members. It now offers a more person-centred service with a style of counselling that encourages people to develop their own coping strategies and is regarded as more robust than a prescriptive, advisory approach.

# Case Study



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## **Challenges**

In a male dominated workforce it can be difficult to get employees to take wellbeing seriously. Many people simply blamed shift-work as a reason for unhealthy lifestyles.

The geographical spread of the business and remote location of some First ScotRail depots has also made it harder to embed a wellbeing culture.

## **Outcomes and benefits of the initiative**

There has been a marked reduction in musculoskeletal and mental health complaints among employees, and First ScotRail's absence rates have gone down from 6.9% to 4.1%.

Massage and chiropody services have been rolled out to all locations and the take-up of appointments has increased dramatically. More than two in three staff who used the stop smoking programme had still not smoked after eight months. As a result, the business hopes to use hypnotherapy to tackle other health issues next year. The personal health challenge has also brought a marked improvement in fitness and proved so popular that First ScotRail is looking to continue it, using in-house resources.

Having signed up for the Healthy Working Lives scheme, First ScotRail achieved a bronze award and is well on its way to a silver award. The health needs' assessment questionnaire the company used confirmed that health and wellbeing campaigns are relevant to employees.

Building on its success, First ScotRail has developed a comprehensive wellbeing programme for next year, aimed at giving employees in all locations equal access to health initiatives.

## **Impact on the organisation**

While absence levels have gone down dramatically, employee engagement has soared as a result of First ScotRail's positive wellbeing strategies. For example, response rates to staff surveys have more than doubled to 44%.

The healthy ageing initiative has also improved its reputation within the wider community and helped attract staff by showing that First ScotRail takes the health of its workforce seriously. A revitalised website recruitment campaign received 80,000 applications in a matter of months. Another campaign, to attract female train drivers, increased applications by 10%.

First ScotRail received Investor in People accreditation across the company in 2008. It was also named UK Passenger Operator of the Year at the National Rail Awards and Scottish Public Transport Operator of the Year. These accolades recognise the company has consistently exceeded targets and brought about a remarkable culture change among the 4,300 strong staff and a huge improvement in customer service.

Most importantly, the Scottish Government granted First ScotRail a three year extension on its franchise last April. Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson stressed that it was down 'to the success of First ScotRail in delivering levels of performance above and beyond those set out in the original franchise agreement'.



### **Lessons learned**

First ScotRail remains committed to the view that staff wellbeing is crucial to quality customer services and good business. But health and wellbeing should not be seen as a top down initiative.

As the strategy progresses, the company is looking to involve more frontline staff by, for example, using them to help source health and wellbeing services locally and design a service that suits their own needs. This should increase staff buy-in to initiatives from the beginning, and reduce perceptions that culture change and people practices only come from head office.

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