Travel Managers: Why Not Make 2018 Your Most Effective Year Ever?

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Now that the dust is settling on the train wreck that was 2017, travel organisers everywhere are gearing up for a new year filled with challenges of its own. You’re probably thinking: if last year was anything to go by, I’ll spend 2018 chasing after employees, trying to get them to keep their spending under control, convincing them to comply with sensible company policies, or even just to keep me informed of what they’re up to. Why should this year be any different than the one before, right?

Wrong! You’ve got everything you need to break the cycle of the past. Now is the time to decide for yourself that you want to do things differently. The first step toward positive change is recognising your own responsibility to make that choice.

Stephen R. Covey starts his classic book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by teaching us the importance of being proactive. Things won’t just change on their own; you must make a choice and take the necessary steps to create the changes you need. So, let’s make 2018 all about focusing on positive changes we can make in our direct surroundings. Trendwatchers predict that business travel levels worldwide will remain stable in 2018, with slight increases in airfare and hotel prices. If you want to see better outcomes in your travel organisation for the year ahead, now’s the time to start planning. This e-book is your companion to setting - and achieving - smart goals for your company’s travel planning and management. We challenge you and your colleagues to reach new heights in 2018. Whether it’s keeping costs under control, managing compliance or improving reporting processes and communication; this e-book covers some of the most urgent issues travel organisers faced last year - and gives tips for doing things differently from now on. Don’t forget: you have everything it takes to make 2018 your most effective year yet.
If you think your travel planning and management could have been more effective in 2017, you’re already on the path to finding solutions. Look at the year ahead as an opportunity to identify and work through some of those nagging problem areas from the past.

Start by simply asking some important questions: What if my company could get its travel spending within budget this year? What if all travellers would stick with the travel policy from now on? What if we could all work together to improve our communications and make this our most transparent year ever?

According to Forbes, posing your New Year’s resolutions in the form of a question automatically gets you on a more solutions-oriented path towards achieving them. Asking ‘what if’ enables you to envision positive outcomes. Just imagine what the answers to these questions would mean for your company’s bottom line and the effectiveness of your travel management.
Bucks to Burn: Getting Your Budget Under Control

In today’s volatile economy, managing travel costs is nothing less than a survival strategy for companies of all sizes. Travel organisers are all very familiar with the importance of keeping costs under control. The start of a new year is a great moment to take inventory of your cost-cutting measures. Figure out what’s working – and what’s not – and work as a team to come up with an effective budget strategy.

Think Ahead

According to research by the Travel Leaders Group, business travel is most often subject to very short-term planning. Nearly half of all business trips are booked less than two weeks in advance. In the business world, short-term planning is often inevitable. However, have you considered whether your travellers are booking on short notice for trips that could have been booked much earlier?

We all know the savings benefits of booking travel arrangements further in advance. Sit down with your travellers early in the year and make a calendar of all their foreseeable travel needs. If there’s a possibility of booking several months in advance, take advantage of it. Your team will enjoy greater savings by booking earlier. Be sure to check out this handy toolkit from Booking.com for Business with resources for streamlining your corporate travel planning.

Healthy, Wealthy and Wise

The cost of business travel doesn’t end once a ticket is purchased and a hotel room is booked. A recent study featured in The Economist highlights the serious effects business travel can have on employee health. While these effects are not yet fully understood, it’s never too soon to get serious about your travellers’ well-being.

Team up with your company doctor or an external health expert to provide information and training sessions focussed on healthy travel habits. Healthy travellers will not only perform better on the road, they’ll save your company in absenteeism and sick pay. Investing in employee health is a smart, long-term formula for cutting costs.
Playing by the Rules: Rethinking Compliance

Business travel is hard work, but there’s also something liberating about being on the road. This is one of the great benefits of business travel for employees: the sense of autonomy and professional empowerment it brings. For travel organisers, whose job is to make sure travel planning and bookings take place according to strict policies, it’s not always so much fun. If you’ve spent 2017 chasing employees for incomplete paperwork and about incorrect reporting, try taking a new approach to policy compliance in 2018. Here are a few tips to get you off to a good start.

Think ‘Relationships’

According to Lauren Keller Johnson of Harvard Business School, today’s employees are more loyal to their own careers than they are to their specific employer. Travel organisers and compliance managers in general must keep this in mind if they want to successfully engage with their team members. Think of your team members as business relationships. The relationship goes both ways: both parties need to see a benefit before they will willingly commit.

Try creating a culture that values compliance as a universal professional skill. If there are specific areas where many employees are failing to comply, talk openly about these issues to see whether the policy may need revision. Try using the visual policy builder from Booking.com for Business to make sure you cover all your bases. If you’re dealing with tough policies that cannot be revised, just be candid with employees about the importance and necessity of the specific policy. The more input employees have in shaping the relationship, the more they will invest in it.

Give Positive Feedback – Constantly

One reason why compliance is such a touchy subject is because many employees only deal with the negative side of it: they are reprimanded whenever they fail to comply with a policy. Turn compliance into a positive by giving incentives and rewards to those who set a good example through their behaviour.

If possible, make compliance an open, public process where team members automatically receive recognition for a job done right. Try using a whiteboard or other high-visibility reminder to ‘keep score’. Employees will naturally be motivated to compete with one another and this will result in self-sustaining good habits.
The Next Level: Gamification

If you’re ready to take compliance management even further, why not try gamification? Research shows that introducing elements from game play, such as progressing to higher levels, earning points and receiving real-time feedback, has a strong positive effect on employee motivation. Gamification is a fun and effective way to improve compliance while also increasing job satisfaction and teamwork.

There are many different options, ranging from the very high-tech to the very low-budget. Consider working with an external expert and your colleagues in IT and HR to find a sustainable solution for your team’s specific compliance needs.

Keep Up to Date

If you expect your employees to be up to speed with the latest policies, it’s essential that they have complete access to the information they need. The start of the year is a great time to review employee handbooks and intranet articles to ensure employees have access to clear, correct information.

Now is also a good opportunity to offer refreshers and training sessions to highlight any changes in policy. Be sure to engage with employees and find out how they think the policies will impact their everyday lives. Take their feedback seriously and look for ways to make difficult policies as workable as possible for everyone.
Getting in Touch: Improving Communication and Reporting

Travel organisers often feel like they lose contact the moment their employees board a plane or train. Keeping in touch is not just about supervising company time or managing costs, it’s also about ensuring employees’ safety and maintaining a sense of company culture, despite the long distances that separate you. If you felt like your travellers kept you in the dark in 2017, consider some of the tips below to make 2018 more transparent.

The Key to Communication…

We all know it’s true in our personal lives, but the same applies at work: the key to communication is being a good listener. Ask your employees lots of questions and try to empathise with them. That means understanding how they experience their jobs and what you can do as a travel organiser to improve things for them. A feedback form can be very helpful for gaining the insights you need. Check out the business traveller’s feedback form created by Booking.com for Business as part of its travel planning toolkit.

If you’re not a natural listener (many of us are not), try taking notes during important conversations or recording them with your phone for future reference.

Be sure to give employees plenty of opportunities to give feedback. What’s important to them should also be important to you. If company policies are out of touch with the employees’ real lives, you’ll never know unless you ask. It might take some compromising on both sides to find the right solution, but most importantly, keep the conversation going.

On Your Feet

One of the most effective trends to have emerged from agile, digital company culture is the daily stand-up (sometimes referred to as a ‘Scrum meeting’). This is a quick meeting, usually about 15 minutes, to kick off the day. All members of the team are present and have an opportunity to make announcements, give recognition for jobs well done and point out specific challenges.

If your team or company has not yet introduced regular stand-ups, make 2018 the year you get on board with this trend. The internet is filled with good advice on how to get the most out of your stand-ups. So, get on your feet and start talking to each other!
Use Social Media

For many of us, it would be hard to imagine our social lives without apps like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Surprisingly, many companies have been slow to embrace these powerful technologies. For travel organisers, these can be great tools for keeping in touch with employees who are on the road.

Encourage your employees to post positive messages on social media while travelling. This keeps everyone on the same page, including the travel manager. WhatsApp, Skype and Facetime (among others) are also great, free ways to keep in touch from anywhere in the world. If possible, try scheduling a brief video call using one of these apps to check in with employees on the road. This gives them a chance to share any concerns with you and lets them know you care. It also gives you a chance to keep track of any compliance or budgetary issues in real time.
Sticking To It: Setting the Right Goals for the Year Ahead

So, you’ve decided to make the most of 2018? Good choice! But where to begin? Setting lofty goals for yourself and your company is one thing, but achieving them is something else altogether. The real key to success is how you choose your goals in the first place. Here are some ideas for picking the right New Year’s resolution this year. Be sure to keep these tips in mind to make sure 2018 is your most effective year yet.

1. One Thing at a Time

Sure, you’ve got a lot on your plate. But changing behaviour is hard work. It’s best to pick one major topic that you want to change this year (for example, getting travel costs under control) and devote your time and effort to making it happen. The most common cause for failure is biting off more than you can chew. Keep things manageable and realistic by limiting your focus.

2. Be Specific

Once you’ve decided the area you want to focus on, decide what your specific goal is and write it down. If you’re focussed on cutting costs this year, you need to identify exactly how much money you want to save. If you don’t have a clear, specific goal in front of you, how will you know what success looks like when you get there?

3. Track Your Progress

Keep track of your progress in writing. Make sure everyone on the team is aware of the status towards reaching your goal. If you’re serious about achieving the goal, you should be bold enough to put it out there where everyone can see it. This will create even stronger motivation to succeed.

4. Plan for Setbacks

Nobody said this will be easy. Don’t be surprised or discouraged when setbacks occur, for example if projects go over schedule and hotel costs mount up. Don’t beat yourself up. Be analytical and find out how you can learn from any mistakes and improve as a team.
5. Reward Yourself

Be sure to celebrate your victories along the way. Set interim goals and then party heartily as a team whenever you tick one off the to-do list.

6. Think Pros and Cons

Lastly, remember what you’re doing this for. Always return to that basic question of ‘what if’ and think of the added value you are creating for yourselves as a team. Just keep talking and supporting each other, through the setbacks and victories, and get ready to reach new heights in the year ahead!
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