

Broadening conversations to create better people experiences

In conversation with **Deborah Mowbray**,
Head of HR, Lacoste Footwear (PCL)


LACOSTE

THE CUSTOMER

Pentland Brands owns several major fashion and sporting brands including Berghaus, Speedo, Ellesse, and more. Pentland Chaussures Limited (Lacoste Footwear) is one of its subsidiaries and is jointly owned with Lacoste, an almost 100-year-old brand steeped in sporting and style history. Lacoste Footwear designs, develops, and manufactures Lacoste's soughtafter footwear range.



THE CHALLENGE

With around 60 people working across design, development, supply chain, legal, finance and HR, Lacoste Footwear is a lean, fast-paced organisation that relies on the capabilities and commitment of its team. Prior to engaging OpenBlend, the company's approach to performance management had been entirely paper-based, making it difficult for HR to find and pull information, or for employees to revisit their goals.

"We would reinvent the wheel every year, tweaking the form to try and get what we wanted out of it. And we would blame the form for not getting what we needed, when actually we really needed to look at the whole process."

The Lacoste Footwear team knew they needed a technology solution that could do more than simply create and track performance objectives and ratings. And, as a small, focused team, a key emphasis was placed on supporting employee wellbeing and motivation as a route to driving improved people engagement and performance.



THE SOLUTION



The goal was to embed a more holistic approach to performance management. As part of this, the team sought a tool that would enable broader conversations around wellbeing and motivation, as well as goal-setting. The platform really came into its own when the team was dealing with the effects of the COVID pandemic and the sudden shift to home working. It was against this backdrop that

conversations became even more important - and not just for checking in on progress, but for creating human connections at a time when the pandemic was pushing us apart. There was also a strong desire to use data more effectively – a goal that relied on getting everything in one place.

“OpenBlend had all the features we were looking for in a tool. We were very keen to explore the way that the GROW coaching model is built into it, but first and foremost, it was about helping managers to have those vital, human conversations and to understand the blend that inspires their people. Yes, performance is a big factor, but it’s more than that... it’s about culture, flexibility, understanding each other better, and making sure that everyone gets what they want and need from their working lives.”

OpenBlend’s structure, which is designed to identify what’s important to each individual, offered an “exact fit” relative to the needs of the business. In fact, it was the only platform that brought together all the elements the team was interested in: motivational blend drivers, coaching conversations, and feedback.



“As a piece of software, OpenBlend has enabled us to be head and shoulders above where we were. It’s so simple to use and it’s incredibly intuitive. Yes, you’ll always have some managers who need more help than others, and we make sure we’re available to support people where they need it, but that ease of use has been crucial in getting things working so well.”

Deborah Mowbray,

Head of HR, Lacoste Footwear (PCL)





THE RESULTS

Nearly four years on, OpenBlend is now fully integrated into the way the team works. It's a key part of Lacoste's onboarding process for new employees; it feeds into their ongoing performance and engagement numbers; and it has created new ways for managers to engage with their people.

"OpenBlend has really encouraged people to look more closely at their own performance. We're hearing from managers who are finding it easier to have frank conversations about performance, both good and less good, because employees are reflecting on how they've performed and that reflection opens the door for a better, more productive conversation. The prompts delivered on the system also really help managers to structure those conversations in a way that makes them rewarding and relevant."

OpenBlend has helped the team to formalise a performance process that feels right for them. Objective setting is now required on the system; everyone gets quarterly prompts to check progress on objectives and goals; feedback has become much more common and a more important way of judging success; and the admin burden is much less onerous thanks to the ease of having everything in one place.

"I go into the tool and see the high fives that people are sending to each other... I don't know if people would deliver that same level of ongoing recognition if we didn't have OpenBlend. Our data is also more qualitative now: we're getting real human insight whereas before we had something rather impersonal. People are talking more, sharing more, endorsing and championing each other's performance in role, and that immediately feels more collaborative and flexible."

OpenBlend has also given the HR team – and the business – clear actions on which to base their engagement and performance initiatives. Health and fitness, for example, is consistently cited as a top blend driver, so extracurricular and team-building exercises are now being geared towards bringing people together through physical activity and health. Employees also highlight "clear career goals" as a big motivator: the business has taken this on board, and the result is more promotions from within, thus saving time and money and boosting team engagement. This is supported by OpenBlend's "high fives" feature, with quick recognition of employee achievements enabling leaders to make those promotion decisions more quickly.



Deborah also cites the importance of the evaluate tool in helping senior leaders to eliminate subjectivity bias when discussing top talent: a combination both of clear, actionable data, and a holistic, people-centric approach to succession, promotion and remuneration.

Overall feedback from both managers, employees and senior leadership has been consistently positive. Goals are clearer. Conversations are more effective. And the HR team can see the culture that OpenBlend is supporting: more resilient, more positive, and with ever-increasing candour within teams. The final cherry on the cake has been a marked improvement in wellbeing scores across the business between Q3 and Q4 2021.



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