

Creating a Buzz

Transforming BBC Worldwide's induction programme, Onefish Twofish-style

Back in 2011 BBC Worldwide engaged Onefish Twofish to help breathe some life into their programme for new recruits.



The challenge: find a way to enthuse and inspire delegates, as well as giving them the best possible start to their careers in a commercial organisation quite different in character to the BBC – all on a shoestring budget.

‘When I first joined the HR team, we’d run an induction session every Monday morning,’ says Anna Charleston, BBC Worldwide’s Head of Human Resources Operations. ‘Over the course of 1½ hours we’d give them a whistle-stop tour of the company’s history, including a 45-minute presentation from me and a series of videos.’

Unfortunately, this did little for the new recruits’ engagement at this early stage in their careers. ‘It didn’t take me long to realise that no one was taking much in. There were a lot of glazed looks.’ The delegates weren’t the only ones who didn’t see the point, either. ‘Managers didn’t want them to take time out. It was painful getting them to release their people for the session.’

New employees were also sent on a separate 1½ day-long introduction to the BBC as a whole. Whilst this was intended to give them a solid grounding in the work of its parent company, the effort was misplaced if they didn’t have the context of BBC Worldwide. ‘BBC Worldwide is a complicated company. It was very siloed at the time, international but highly UK-driven – and its commercial nature means it’s quite different to the BBC Public Service.’

Following a personal recommendation, Anna approached Carrie Bedingfield of Onefish Twofish to help find out what was going wrong and to design a new programme.

A Fish-eye view

‘One of the first things we realised was that the company was hiring a huge range of people, from short-term contractors to senior executives,’ says Carrie, ‘but they were all attending the same induction. The second problem was what I called the “Judi Dench effect”’: it was all about the stars, harnessing the actors’ talent. It didn’t give people a sense of their place in the company, or build their commitment and confidence. The induction needed to reflect that this was BBC Worldwide, not the BBC: the nature of the organisation means that people need to think commercially, rather than just focusing on the talent. The induction is probably the most important piece of learning and development employees will receive. It needed to set the tone for their whole careers.’

On Onefish Twofish’s suggestion, the HR team held focus groups to learn what they had missed and what might kick-start new employees’ careers. Those insights formed the basis of the new induction programme. First, though, there was the challenge of selling the idea to the company’s execs – something Anna describes as a ‘hard slog’. ‘We had to thrash out what we were going to do, with very little budget for it. Everyone had their own opinion. Fortunately Carrie won the HR Leadership Team over. She walked in with this amazing home-made cake...’

End-to-end engagement

The new programme included a number of strands and began as early as possible – long before any induction day. ‘Almost as soon as they had the job offer, they’d get an email from the CEO, along with links to useful information on the intranet, promotional videos made by people at BBC Worldwide, anecdotes from new employees – lots to excite them and provide some early interaction with the company.’ The Onefish Twofish team also put together a pack to help managers support new recruits. A series of animated PowerPoint films showed four scenarios for incoming employees, making a series of suggestions for how managers could smooth the transition into their new jobs.

‘People don’t think intellectually when they’re starting a new job. It’s new and exciting – they’re processing everything emotionally.’

But the biggest change was the induction itself – now a full day dedicated to BBC Worldwide. Previously, the session had focused almost exclusively on giving employees the information they would need to get started. ‘People don’t think like that when they’re starting a new job,’ explains Carrie. ‘Everything’s new and exciting, their brains aren’t really in gear. They’re processing everything emotionally. We wanted to tap into that and focus on the experience, rather than deluge them with material they couldn’t take in.’

The new inductions would be held once a month, instead of weekly. In place of the classic orientation videos and presentations, the team rolled out a programme of networking and group exercises. Two people from the company would facilitate the day – one from HR and a senior local champion, with a member of the Executive Board conducting a strategy session. Inductees still received the basic practical information they needed to get started on their first Monday, but the full orientation would now wait until they had settled in properly.

Setting the stage

The day began with a meet-and-greet. The new recruits were directed to a room to sit together at round tables with snacks, where they carried out a Dr. Who-themed get-to-know-you exercise as they waited for the events programme to start.

‘Everything was designed to shift the day onto a very experiential footing, with lots of self-directed learning,’ says Carrie. ‘We wanted to build excitement and create an atmosphere of

expectation. So we started with a dramatic opener: the lights went down and a film started, with no introduction.’ The film was an inspiring people-based montage of BBC Worldwide’s work, but focusing on employees rather than the stars. ‘It totally reversed the norm for the induction and gave a real sense of energy and excitement.’ A critical theme for the day was adult-to-adult communication – creating a culture that fostered autonomy and enabled new recruits to take responsibility, without fear of untoward consequences.

‘We wanted to build excitement and create an atmosphere of expectation.’

Next came a series of sessions to help inductees not only understand BBC Worldwide and its business, but to think about their own place in the company. ‘We developed a session we called the “William and Wendy exercise”, where we encouraged inductees to think about our different audiences by looking at typical viewers around the world,’ says Anna. ‘The point was to explore the idea together in groups, rather than have someone present material to them.’

There was a strong emphasis on networking, which took place at both the beginning and end of the day. One of the first exercises was called ‘It’s not a Lonely Planet’ (at the time, the travel publisher was owned by BBC Worldwide). Delegates paired up with a series of people to find out five things they had in common. This was a response to the insight that previous new staffers spent around six months before they felt they had found their place, and met all the people they needed to do their jobs properly.

Looking forwards

A lot has changed at BBC Worldwide since then, as the company undertook a programme of restructuring early in 2013 to reflect its international nature better. 'We're much less siloed now,' explains Neil Sadler, who took over the induction programme from Anna. 'Best practice is still set by the UK HQ, but more responsibility is given to the regions – after all, they know their markets and competitors best.'

With those changes, the induction day has also evolved. 'We wanted to give delegates more visibility of our international markets, so we introduced a new quiz. We also wanted the exercises to reflect that our breadth of content is our strongest selling point.' Despite the change in focus, the programme still uses the core insights and much of the same material originally devised by Onefish Twofish, now tailored to regional needs. The team have kept the experiential focus and the emphasis on networking, rather than simply firing information at new employees.

'There's a real buzz around the day, right from the film at the beginning.'

The result? 'No more glazed looks. There's a real buzz around the day, right from the film at the beginning. People are excited to be working here. And there's no push back from managers: now, they want their people to attend.'

GET IN TOUCH

E : hello@onefishtwofish.co.uk

T : 0118 321 74 57

