

Why HR is crucial to helping your employees back to travel

00:00

Julian Walker: Good morning, good afternoon. Good evening. And wherever you are, you're most welcome to join us today, as we look at how businesses need to adapt to the changing and evolving travel environment. I'm Julian Walker. This is business travel on the fly. And I'm delighted that we're joined today by Valdís Arnórsdóttir, who is HR director of Marel, the multinational food processing company that's based in Ireland. As the travel industry continues to stop-start kind of way, many employers are planning their search business trips since the start of the pandemic. And travel managers have been preparing for this return in a number of months, over a number of months of working with suppliers and TMCs to ensure that employees can do this safely. And we'll look at how and why travel managers should be working closely with their HR teams to help set new policies and procedures in the COVID-19 era. And we'll also be discussing issues such as mental health and traveler anxiety. So before we get into the nitty gritty, why don't you give us a quick introduction on your role, and specifically how it's linked to the management of travel within Europe?

01:05

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: Most certainly, and thanks for having me to this fireside chat. I really appreciate to be part of it. My role at Marel is to be director of HR operations. HR operations are part of the corporate HR team at the headquarters and gathered by Iceland. Since 2016, when we first signed the contract with CWT, we centralized the travel management at Marel. So I started being responsible for travel management, jointly with my role as being director of HR operations. But last year, we dive into the role of global travel manager. And now we have Camilla Kramer in that role. She was part of the company before from the procurement team. But now, she works with me and together we form a team of both travel and HR together.

02:03

Julian Walker: If a traveler isn't comfortable traveling in a COVID world, what role would you see HR playing to advise the company or the appropriate on the appropriate response or path forward in a situation like that?

02:18

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: And it's a good question. Because HR plays a critical role in this. We have to imagine that this is a new world for travelers, and we need to allow for some adjustment time to the new situation. We need to create atmosphere for employees to express how they feel towards

this situation now. We need to think about that. Like for, for our travelers at Marel it is male dominant company more or less. Features from sending gifts are more or less male employees, and those are the roles who have been actively traveling during the pandemic. Even we have called those employees road warriors, because they will fight to get to the customers and get the job done, they had to reach the practitioners at some times. And we have to make room for them to express how they feel. So we have to understand that they can be worried, they can be stressed out they can be concerned about family members or friends or their own health. So first and foremost, HR needs to create this room for them to share how they feel so that we can have them address it. What HR can do in addition is to map all risks involved. And by mapping out the risks involved, we can also find mitigation actions, actions to lower the risks and address them and therefore lower the risk that or lower the exposure to the employees. We've also learned in Marel, the clear message, we can provide the better. We need to erase all uncertainty, we need to extend the timeline when we can have guide lines applicable so that if we are constantly working in a short timeline, then it creates more uncertainty for the employee. So longer time line, clear messages, it really helped to erase all uncertainty for them and make them feel better towards traveling. .

04:25

Julian Walker: Traveling spending time can be a toll on travelers, mental and physical health, and especially in times like this. So that's good to have a perspective on how HR can work on that. But do you think there should be policies or procedures or processes that should actually be put in place to increase the duty of care and help the well being of anxious employees now? And if so, how would HR sort of help support travel managers by introducing things like that?

04:54

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: Travel guidance to be adjusted to the most recent situation and you need to ensure the employees that they will be taken care of no matter what, again, clear messages and erase all uncertainty as possible. We have also made sure to provide training on risk awareness, and the latest travel guide while traveling during the pandemic, to employees and their managers. It's not only the employees, the risk that is involved, but also the managers because they are most often making decisions and approving on be trips to be taken. We have also used global companies like International SOS to support employees for port or just to provide them with an application so that they can regularly check in so we know where they are. And they can get information about situations in the relevant country or area that they are in. Lastly, and not the least one, and this has become a critical part for us in Marel, it is to provide support on legal documents. Because for employees to be able to cross borders, they have needed to show legal documents, both to show that they are are crossing borders for business reasons, they have needed to show papers to verify that Marel is a critical player in the food industry. They have needed to cross many borders and the different restrictions, or border controls for different areas. So we need to prepare different papers for our employees to be able to travel back and forth to the customer sites. So these are the areas that we need to focus on at this time.

06:59

Julian Walker: Excellent and I haven't really thought about that. But that's a very good point in terms of the extra legal documentation that you'll be using and things like that. And so is there a sort of strategy for how changes to the travel policy are being implemented post COVID-19? Because obviously, the situation changes on a kind of daily basis almost at the moment. So do you have a strategy for how you're creating these changes?

07:24

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: Yeah, of course. I mean, we saw something like that. Yeah, that's definitely we saw that in the beginning of the pandemic that we needed to address that. So must this year. And the focus then was of course, on the pre approval of the trips, and also focused on there was a business essential need to travel. We didn't have that before, then everybody was allowed to travel. And of course, we needed to have proof, but we added in our criteria for for that the trip was business essential. So then we came to the conclusion, okay, what is business essential and then addressed that by by definition, but it's still challenging, until borders just closed. At that same time, we can sit all in house activities that requested the employee to travel cross borders. And we also had to cancel what we are used to having throughout the year as show house and exhibitions. Because we couldn't meet up with our athletes nor our equipment to the sites to invite our customers to come and see how our systems work. So we transport everything there to an online show. And we are actively working with what we call normal life. These are changes that we had to address immediately, early spring. During the summertime, we saw that borders were opening up again. So then everybody was starting to make plans for traveling again and we saw requests just piling in then we trust the travel guidelines again We had to iterate both the pre approval process that it was really strict. In our case, extended leadership team can approve for the trips, they have to approve for all trips with an essentiality to it. And we also wanted to address the risk awareness of ? when approving for for travel so that they understood all the risk factors that were involved from the time that they left until he was home. So those are the factors that we have been focusing on during this this time period since the spring,

10:05

Julian Walker: okay, yeah, all good stuff. And before we went into this, there was a interval pandemic and the lockdown and the changes, virtualization was the sort of key thing that everyone was trying to sort of look at, to give travelers more control. Do you think COVID-19 has changed the amount of control and choice that we're now letting employees have on how they manage the trip, and that sort of could be from picking their suppliers or slots for travel, etc, when they are doing essential business travel,

10:36

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: I think there is a huge difference now and before for COVID. We are relying on such a small group now to travel for business essential reasons. That group really needs to be taken care of, since they are being exposed to higher risk than the employees that are working from home or for the offices. Because there we can more manage the risks that they are being exposed to, for the ones traveling, we need to be able to keep them safe and well while traveling. So we need to make sure that they are hurt, that they are recognized, and that they get constant feed and moving traveling and afterwards. So in the future, and we haven't made any firm decisions about this, I'm absolutely sure that we have more studying, choosing the suppliers for both air and travel by car or by train, the travel classes and so on. For suppliers today, they should aim to be the suppliers for the future. They need to take COVID effect into account because travelers to date need more flexibility and assurance that the supplier is actively mitigating the risks that are exposed to them. So there are good opportunities for suppliers today to stop but focus on how things will be postponed when they will travel again.

12:18

Julian Walker: OK. And do you think when we look at the other side, and obviously this isn't relevant just in this precise moment. But bleisure, combining business and leisure was an increasingly popular choice for a number of people. I wonder, do you have a company policy on bleisure trips? And also should employees take them at their own risk? Or do you think that companies should take some form of responsibility? If you allow it, that is.

12:43

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: I think we went through a huge discussion about that for Marel. It's different for different countries, we are operating in over 30 countries. So we had to take this discussion with all our local practice teams to see what was available in each company. On a global scale, we advised all our employees to follow the local guidelines on personal trips. So look at the companies are legally required to take part of that responsibility. So if you are, if you need to quarantine then the company is obligated to pay your salaries during that time, that is in some countries, but overall for millions of employees to be aware of the risks involved if they decide to take a personal trip during a pandemic like now, and we all know that things can change without advance. So if we are in a different country than where we live, we could build that for a longer period or a shorter one, we could get sick, they're going to get to our home country. So there are so many things to take into account and individuals just need to be aware of the risks that are involved. At Marel, we have initiated a global pay policy. So we support employees, if they're in the position of not being able to work for various reasons. Bleisure trips can be one of them, but it's only applicable for a limited time and for a limited number of days. But what we have also done at Marel, and I would really like to share with you what we have done to come to terms with the actions or for the traveling parts for employees is that we have this contract with international SOS. All employees they have got an application so that they can call a number so if they are in need of support, they can at the same time. We also set up a COVID-19 intranet site to consolidate all the actions that we have taken and have the latest version over time. We've also created the people and culture site. There, we mention both mental support, and collect everything that HR is

doing to support employees during the pandemic, for specifically for traveling employees with specific emails. So employees and managers, they can get direct feedback to questions or concerns that they might have at each time. And, of course, proper companies, we of course, have local crisis teams supporting employees all over the world. HR is always part of that team, always an HR person involved. And then last, but not least, to mention, again, this specific legal title. So it provides all necessary documents, to support employees to travel across borders. So even for intersections within the country, because in some districts, your promises have different regulations than others. So this is what we have done all over the company. But specifically for relationships, it's a good thing to have a global guideline on.

16:35

Julian Walker: Fantastic. We're getting quite close to the end of our sort of 20 minute slot. So I really appreciate you taking that you're giving us some great insights. And obviously, HR has a fundamental impact in the role of travel within.....

16:53

Valdís Arnórsdóttir: Of course, we all want to travel in the future. It's no question about it, we all miss it as much as any other. Some people at Marel have said, the most thing that I miss from before COVID is to travel and before COVID is to travel. So we want to do that again. But it has to be safe. And we need a strong focus from the travel people from HR and legal to join forces and ensuring that traveling today is safe, that it is available for business essential reasons. And that during travel, we are exposing our people to as low risk as possible so that they would we are all aiming to do. So maybe as a final word that I would like to pose is that we keep being strong that we keep sharp focus and resilience to beat this virus and reclaim the freedom that the virus has actually taken away from us.

17:59

Julian Walker: I totally endorse that. 100%. So thank you very much. That was great. There's plenty to think about there for our audience. Thank you so much for joining us today. It's been truly fascinating and insightful. For those of us joining on the webinar, perhaps you could answer the tell us what you thought of the webinar polling question please just so we can develop a future events. So it only really remains to me to say thank you. I really appreciate you joining us. Thank you for your insights. And thank you all for joining us here today. And until we next meet on the fly, safe travels.