



Ways to Work: Episode 3 — Creating authentic connections in the virtual workplace

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NICO BAMBAAO: We are a strong believer of the circle of happiness, meaning we take good care of our people with our signature Alagang Globe. And we know that if we take good care of them, these are the same individuals who will really take good care of our customers.

NARRATOR: Welcome to "Ways To Work," a WTW podcast series exploring the modern workplace through the lenses of people and risk with a focus on the Philippines and the broader Asian market. We provide access to current thinking on topics that matter most to employers and employees.

LEE BRIONES: Hi everyone! Welcome to our next installment of our employee experience series. This episode is special since we've invited one of our longest clients in the engagement arena -- Globe Telecom, and we are joined this time by the head of employee experience of Globe -- Nico Bambao. Thank you, Nico, for joining us. And great to have you on board.

NICO BAMBAAO: Thank you so much Lee, and of course, it's my pleasure to be with all of you. That's true, we've been the longest -- I mean, for the longest time, we've been a client of Willis Towers Watson. And I'm just happy to be with you today.

LEE BRIONES: Thank you, Nico. I'll get right to my first question. Over the past 21 or so months, where we're experiencing COVID, what were the specific priorities that were cited by your leaders and organization on how Globe can adjust to this new environment?

NICO BAMBAAO: I think the priority that we had from the very start was really our people. And I'm just very proud and happy to be part of Globe because I've seen it from our senior leaders. Imagine the initiatives that they rolled out, building our own Globe PCR laboratory, just to accelerate getting the results of our people, making sure that our stores and other offices are really built with safety protocols to protect our people, as well.

I'm glad to say, as well, that we didn't lay off any employee. We really took care of our people. There are a lot of work-from-home programs, from ergonomic chairs to allowing them to encash their vacation leaves just to give them more cash capabilities and purchasing power to equip the employees in setting up their own work-from-home areas, as well as supporting even their kids who are going to the schools.



So we even provided discounted iPads and gadgets so they can also help their people. So I think generally it was really our people, because we are a strong believer of the circle of happiness, meaning we take good care of our people with our signature Alagang Globe.

And we know that if we take good care of them, these are the same individuals who will really take good care of our customers. And of course, when we are able to make our customers happy, it will go back to the shareholders. And when we have shareholders who are happy, again, it's going back to the people through bonuses, incentives, and even a lot of professional development programs for our employees.

So yes, that is what I've seen. Of course, the business also took care of our customers. But coming from an HR's perspective, I couldn't ask for more. I've been comparing a lot of practices with friends and then even colleagues from different industries. And I would say that Globe really gave so much more than what our people expected. But again, taking care of them so that we can also give back and pay it forward to our customers.

LEE BRIONES: Those are truly some awesome interventions and responses that you've made to assist your people. Could you also discuss something, what you've done around connecting people while in the pandemic? I'm sure all of you went to work from home. So what did you do around social connectedness and, most importantly then, mental wellbeing while in the pandemic?

NICO BAMBAO: That's a good story to talk about because I think that the year 2020 really placed HR under the spotlight. And we were given all the pressure. People were always asking, what will HR do? How will HR support us?

So come lockdown time, since we were really placed under the spotlight, we had to respond quickly. So we did a lot of Kamustahans. I think just within the first week, we invited all our senior leaders, the top senior leaders, to reach out to our critical, skeletal force, those who are really required to keep the nation running, keep the nation together through connectivity.

And they really appreciated that. But it gave birth to a lot more opportunities. Previously we were doing a lot of physical activities, physical roadshows, and doing a lot of travel within the regions. And we saw the opportunity to, this time, focus on reaching out to everyone but digitally.

So we created our own podcast channel. It's called "The Good Vibes Club." So it's a mixture of those webinars that they need to have, meaning talking about the pandemic, how can you keep your sanity while you're at home.

We also had our interest clubs hosting our yoga classes, our Zumba classes online. And that's being aired nationwide regardless whether you're in the critical skeletal force or part of the work-from-home team. And that is just one portion of "The Good Vibes Club." So we were able to generate a lot of good hosts from our employees.



And they also hosted not just the webinars but also the fun nights. So previously we were doing a lot of karaoke nights and fun activations physically. So through "The Good Vibes Club," we also had fun activities. I'm sure you're very familiar with Kahoot!, these programs. We had a lot of quiz bees, singing bees, charades and so on.

So it's a combination of being able to make sure we're able to reach out to our people physically, meaning, I mean, in terms of working out. And of course, mentally, we also had a lot of speakers talking about mental wellbeing, talking about financial wellbeing, what are you supposed to take care of currently, given that there's a pandemic. So don't quit your job yet. Try to save and just be ready for the future.

And of course, there's the fun side of it. So that's just the first one. It's "The Good Vibes Club." And on top of that, we also saw the opportunity to really track our people's health -- physical health first.

So again, being placed under the spotlight, in eight days, the team was able to develop the bot called Digital Usher for Disasters and Emergencies. He is my favorite because DUDE, or the bot that we created, in short -- the shorter version of the Digital Usher for Disasters and Emergencies. He looks like Baymax and Russell, coming from the movie "Up," -- and somewhat like Kinder Bueno, because the team really likes eating chocolates and a lot of food. So it was well loved by the people because we made checking in very fun. So every day, DUDE sends out a different message, checking up on the people. And it grew along the way. Just from becoming a disaster and emergency bot, it's now a wellness bot. So that is where we started integrating exercise initiatives, mental health initiatives, or even COVID-related requirements. So any time of the day, you can report that you have been exposed or you have something to report or you need something, like the PPEs for our critical skeletal force. You can ask it there. You can even connect to a psychiatrist or a psychologist if you need help, specifically for mental health related requirements.

And I must say, we have been even globally recognized under the Stevies and Aces because of that. We were also recognized to have that purposeful innovation because it's not just coming up with a bot. But it's really coming up with a bot with a heart, you know?

LEE BRIONES: Correct. It's not just the tool.

NICO BAMBAAO: Yes.

LEE BRIONES: It's how you are able to integrate that with a truly human experience that really makes a difference. Yeah.

NICO BAMBAAO: Yes. And you know what, Lee? Right now, if, for example -- it's a bot. So probably in a period of one year, once or twice, there will be some delays. And people would really just tell you, where is DUDE? What happened to DUDE? I'm missing DUDE.



So there was one time we had a glitch because we hosted it under Workplace as a platform, under Facebook. And people were really saying, is DUDE sick? "DUDE, it's OK. Please get some rest as well." So you will really see how much they've embraced that. That's why we were able to expand it even to wellness.

So that's DUDE. But aside from, of course, "The Good Vibes Club," DUDE, the third one is on mental health. Prior to the pandemic, we had the face-to-face psychologists and psychiatrists located in our offices. But given the distance and given the work-from-home setup, we realized that people, our employees, wanted not really the face-to-face or even the video calls or consultations. And we tested, and we partnered with an Australian firm called Virtual Psychologists. And we branded it as Hope Chat. So if you're the employee who is really in need of mental help, regardless of whatever it is you're experiencing, you can do that via chat.

I'm not sure if, for Filipinos, it's easier for us to consult via chat instead of doing it face to face. And the requirement really increased. And it really helped our employees in coping up with the pandemic. So they do it via chat. They use their personal Facebook messenger so we don't get to track their discussions.

And you'll be surprised because we are sent the reports regularly. And you'll be surprised. And it's not just the work that they're bothered or concerned about. There are a lot of personal issues that were also happening among our employees -- break-ups, being separated from their family.

So we try to see that, OK, there are opportunities also for us to bring our families and incorporate the family members in the initiatives that we do. That's why even for the work-from-home setup, we included the family for the online or the virtual -- say, Trick or Treat, we included the family members, as well. [LAUGHS]

So there were a lot of initiatives that came from these particular results that we have. So I think the top three would be those. It's Hope Chat. It's DUDE as a bot, and of course "The Good Vibes Club," in keeping everyone connected regardless of where they are.

In fact, you will see when they engage in our platforms, you will see people from Baguio to Davao. And you just hear from everyone.

LEE BRIONES: It's great having this chat with you. You also answered my second question already by citing specific examples of how Globe was able to fully leverage technology to build authentic connections. And those examples are truly awesome from what you've gathered.

Globe has become a really, truly transformative organization, which, from our definition, is an organization that would have high integration when it comes to their experience strategy as well as their digital strategy. And I'm sure that's what other organizations aspire to become. Could you give some key



examples on what were those key priorities or principles that you considered when creating this very digital and connected new work environment that you managed to create?

NICO BAMBAGO: Right. The first one is really the signature Alagang Globe. I mean, you will hear a lot of great programs also from other organizations. I mean, these are not just unique to Globe. But I think what really made the difference is that we prioritized not just our customers but also our people.

So again, going back to our circle of happiness philosophy, it's very crucial that we remain true to our North Star, which is our purpose, to treat people right, to create a globe of good. So if we really don't treat our employees right, we cannot expect them to give something that they don't have or that they don't experience from within.

So we continuously communicated and listened. In fact, especially last year, you will hear from our president, Ernest Cu every, I think, two weeks. And he'll be updating -- he'll be very transparent with what's happening. "We need your help. We need you to take care of each other. We need to reach out to each other. Take care of our customers."

And because of the transparency, we're really able to hear from our people. So imagine utilizing DUDE previously, we're able to gather a lot of sentiments. We're able to understand what their needs are. So being true to what the people need and how we can really equip them and help them the best way we can really defined or determined -- in fact, we didn't even imagine doing all those things last year. But because of the constant communication and being true to the Alagang Globe vision, that in everything we do, we should make our people feel that they're taken care of.

It just gave birth to a lot of initiatives. So it was really constant communication. It's not just copying what's out there and bringing it internally. But you just need to understand what the people really need. So for example, for mental health, I think a lot of organizations really experienced that, as well. So we kept on listening. And imagine, we even created our meeting etiquette because people were saying, "Okay, our meetings are extending until 10:00 in the evening. We start our day at 8:00 AM."

So we started the meeting etiquette. And then we saw it was not enough, as well. So we even asked our senior leaders to approve the Thursdays by the Desk. It is one of the well-loved programs that we have, because I, myself, experienced that -- you have meetings from 8:00 AM until 8:00 PM, and you don't get to do your desk job anymore.

So every Thursday afternoon, we block the calendar of all the employees. Every 12 noon, onwards, it's going to be TBD. It's Thursdays by the Desk. You do your desk job. We monitor the Zoom usage, who are the folks who are still holding meetings. And it's just to give people a breather.



So as I mentioned, there are a lot of great programs outside which you can just automatically copy. But you really have to customize. And you really have to listen to your people.

And some would say, OK, you've been releasing a lot of surveys. You might experience a survey fatigue. But you know what? When people start seeing that you're doing something about whatever it is that they're saying, they will just continuously give you feedback.

But of course there's still a balance between giving everything versus giving what they really need because they're still human beings. There are times they will still ask beyond what they're supposed to get, right? But I think given that kind of relationship that we're able to build and they feel the genuine care that we have for them, you will see people even using #AlangangGlobe.

It's not something that we did a campaign on. But they will just say, whenever they do their vaccine, #AlangangGlobe because we're even expanding the vaccines for their families, even for their household, even for their friends. We even ordered vaccines for our people. I hope I was able to answer your question, Lee.

LEE BRIONES: Yeah, I'm just down to my last question. Since our listeners are actually not -- most of them probably would not be as savvy as you are when it comes to these experienced models -- digital transformation. Some may have just stumbled in the recording to see what's up. In a simple way, what do you think is the key component or the key connection to having a great experience and digital strategy?

NICO BAMBAGO: In simple terms, I think it's crucial for you to really know your audience. There is no "one size fits all" approach or strategy. But as soon as you get to understand your people, whether it's an internal or external customer, you will know their pain points. And you will be able to even forecast what their potential needs are in the future.

You'll be surprised that previously we were just reactive to what their needs are. But this time around, we have been in power to really experiment and even provide something they have not even thought of. So just take risks. Of course, get to know your customers. And even just be creative about the programs that you want to launch. Just test. And if it fails, you fail fast. If not, do it in sprints.

It doesn't have to be perfect during the first launch. Do it in sprints. And just continue innovating because at the end of the day, the technology will change fast. And it's a matter of going back to your core principle. What is your objective? It's to take care of your people and knowing how you can help improve their lives.

So technology is just an avenue or a platform for you to use that. But take bold risks. And continuously innovate. And I think the ideas will just flow. Ideas will just flow. And things can just happen.



LEE BRIONES: This is a very great session, Nico. I didn't really have to speak or share my thoughts now. Your insights that you've shared are something our listeners will really appreciate. Seeing it from an expert and from an industry leader such as Globe and yourself, it's really, truly an amazing conversation to have.

And thank you, Nico. And thank you for your time. And thank you for your support, as always, in Willis Towers Watson's initiatives. And thank you, also, for sharing your insight.

NICO BAMBANO: This is, again, an honor and a privilege to be joining you and, of course, our very strong partner for so many years, Willis Towers Watson.

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NARRATOR: Thank you for joining us for this WTW podcast, featuring the latest perspectives on the intersection of people, capital, and risk. For more information, visit the Insights section of wtwco.com.