

The Joyous logo is written in a white, lowercase, cursive script font. It is positioned at the top center of the page, overlaid on a background image of three people in an office setting. The background image shows a man on the left smiling, a person in the center with their back to the camera, and a woman on the right looking towards the man. They appear to be in a meeting or collaborative work environment.

joyous

A conversation with Firstgas Group on adopting open employee feedback

As New Zealand's biggest gas supplier Firstgas Group delivers natural gas and LPG to about 400,000 New Zealanders up and down the country. They own, operate and look after the network of pipes, storage and machinery needed to deliver energy to their customers.

Firstgas Group has a serious focus on making the organisation the best place to work by building on their supportive and collaborative culture. All of which makes Joyous the perfect fit for employee feedback!

Post-launch, Joyous Head of Product Ruby Kolesky caught up with Firstgas Group GM People and Culture, Kellie O'Sullivan and CEO, Paul Goodeve to discuss the path that led them to Joyous.

Listening to employee feedback at Firstgas Group



Kellie

Before Joyous we were using a traditional engagement survey and checking in every 12 to 18 months. We got the results, but didn't really use the survey as a way to make the culture better for our people – we focused more on the score as the outcome. That didn't feel quite right to us.

We've got 360 passionate people across the country and most people know each other pretty well. Firstgas Group feels like a family and having a big over the top survey just really didn't fit our culture, so we went out and found Joyous.

We had been thinking of changing things up for a bit, but with Covid changes we wanted something fast that we could keep connected with our people and understand how they were feeling. Our focus firstly was from a wellbeing point of view and then when we saw what Joyous could do we realised we could use this tool to understand how people were adjusting to our new post-Covid work reality and so much more!

Launching open feedback



Kellie

Joyous did a superb job with implementation; the speed and the ease with which the team did everything was amazing. Everything was planned, even the things that often become a hurdle for us as an HR team, like the training. Joyous had already anticipated the time required and the questions that we'd need to answer. It was all amazing, and so slick.

If they say 'do this training the day before', then that training's going to be the right thing to do. And if they say 'do it on a Tuesday', then Tuesday's the best day for it. They know what they're doing. They've thought it all through, they've got it nailed, and they were able to build that trust really quickly by being so polished at the front end.

And we found working with the Firstgas Group team amazing; it's really evident how onto it everyone is. I can even remember how Kellie was looking at me during the leader training, and how she was smiling and how engaged she was. In fact everyone on the exec was really engaged at that meeting, and some great questions came out of it.

In the first week Firstgas Group chose to focus on well-being questions, because they were still coming out of the Covid run and wanting to reassess how people felt. And by a really strong margin Firstgas Group has had the best engagement we've seen on any launch to date.

The employee response rate is high, but not significantly higher than average. What is interesting is the leader engagement: how many leaders responded to people.

Firstgas Group had almost twice the level of leader engagement on the first question than the next-best performing organisation.

I think there's a direct correlation between this and the fact that their question fatigue is very low - the trend from question to question is very close to stable. We want to understand the key differences between Firstgas Group and other organisations, because they're standing out in a really interesting way.



Ruby

Leading by example: executive engagement as a key to success

Paul took a really active role in the leader and Exec training. If I have to think of a key difference, that's the first time the Chief Executive has done that at an organisation with me. He was really engaged and sent a great message, which was awesome to see.



Ruby



Kellie

We had accessed the demo tool prior to the training and I think that was a key part of why it all went so smoothly. It meant everyone from the IS team to the Executive team had exposure to how simple it was to use and we could connect people up in a time that suited them versus having a more formal demonstration. Paul (our CEO) had played around with the tool and knew it well before we launched.



Paul

Having that level of access to the tool early on really made me see its potential to help us make continuous and positive changes to our culture and the way we work. My view is that I can't expect others to be invested in something that I don't see value in, so it was important to me to be an active participant in the training sessions and convey my endorsement of the tool to everyone up front.

It's the first time we've given a customer a demo to play with, so we'll be doing that from now on!



Ruby



Kellie

It cut down the time so much. I was able to show them, "look it's really simple, it's really intuitive, even I can show you how it works". That's what got the Exec team really excited, and straight away the IS guys were like "okay, we get it now, let's do it."

When it came to launching Joyous, Paul did a really great lead in. He talked to everybody about how excited he was about it, and what a difference he thought it could make for supporting our people. He also pitched it really well. One of the key messages was "We're not forcing anyone to do this. But we want to hear what's going well and what's not, and then we can do something about it."

Other members of Exec really shone too. Their genuine enthusiasm for wanting to hear from their people, and level of engagement, was awesome. What really came through was how much they genuinely cared. I don't know that every company gets this right. That they have senior leaders who are this genuinely caring and not just trying to tick a box.



Ruby

Using Joyous for micro- and macro-changes

Your numbers are amazing but we have to remember that monitoring them is just a means to an end. The real goal is the change. On top of maintaining the momentum we need to ensure that we make changes, and that we're encouraging leaders to make changes. Is that something that you've got on your radar?



Ruby



Kellie

Yes. And this is really led from the top. At Exec we talk about how we can get the themes of feedback flowing up, how we can act on those nuggets of information, and how we're going to make sure that we're doing the right thing and making some progress.

The conversational and continuous aspects of Joyous also mean we hear from more people than we would otherwise. We've got lots of introverts who don't always speak up. Usually you hear the loud voices and respond to those, but they might not be the majority, and there might be interesting views that never get aired. Joyous gives us a really nice way of seeing how people are feeling. And when we know that, then we can do something with it.

So we're making sure that we tie actions back to feedback. We'll work it into our systems and processes, and make sure that we keep looping that back in our comms.



Paul

Some people just aren't comfortable putting themselves out there and speaking up, so it's great to have a structured avenue for people to give feedback and have conversations with their managers about their experiences. Although there's transparency in the Joyous tool, conversations at the micro level are left between people and their managers – we made a decision very early on that this is where the relationship is, and where the most actionable change can take place. Interruption of these conversations up the management line is counterproductive and unhelpful.

What Joyous do well though is theme the feedback up regularly right across Firstgas Group so we can see the wider picture of what our people are saying. **From the position of making incremental change and having your finger on the pulse, it's worlds apart from a yearly traditional survey.**

Would you say Joyous is actually motivating more change at a macro level than the previous way of doing things?



Ruby



Kellie

I think it will. Some conversations are about peoples' immediate manager or their team, and some are about the whole system. So there's different levels of change involved.

On the micro-level Joyous helps by surfacing information. In one case an issue had been on the boil for years, and we'd had multiple people involved in dealing with it. It was brought up in Joyous, the manager saw the feedback and went and discussed it with the person involved. They talked it over, resolved the issue and now they have a plan. That in itself is worth the investment!

The macro-level Joyous questions are more challenging for the organisation. If people say they're frustrated with the tools or systems we use to do things then we have to address that organisation-wide. We've got to either say: "we can't make any changes to this right now", or "yes we're prioritising this". And then we really need to make it happen.



Are you already talking to the organisation about the feedback? Does Paul do a roundup where he just spends one minute going “we heard this from you guys and we’re not in a position to do something today, but I hear you”?



Ruby



Kellie

We have plans! This week we’re sharing the insights. The team can see that the data goes somewhere, and get a sense of the report we’re looking at. Then as people get more confident we’ll share some stories about how feedback has resulted in changes. We want to keep the comms going without being too heavy, and we want everyone to feel comfortable speaking up.

We’ve had a few people say “this is really good”, but they’re generally not effusive personalities. The fact that they’re still using Joyous tells us that they’re getting value from it, they’re enjoying it and that it’s easy to use.

I also took the report to the Chair of the Board and he loved it, which is fantastic because he’s also the chair of the People and Capability board. He really cares about people, and he’s very interested in what the Joyous data tells us.

What's next for Joyous and Firstgas Group?



Kellie

We're going to keep asking questions! It'll be interesting to see if we need to tailor them at all. That's part of what I really like about Joyous: we can change the questions depending on what's going on with the organisation.

You don't see that in many other employee feedback tools, but I think you'd come across as really disconnected from the organisation if you couldn't adapt your questions. It'd look like the Exec team doesn't understand what their people are feeling, or doesn't know what their people care about. Especially if you come out with a question that's really blunt and impersonal when your people are going through something difficult.

For example, flexible working, which the whole Covid situation has made a lot more important. We don't want to ask "how's it going?" because everyone will go "fine". What we really want to know is "how is flexible working leading to the culture that we want as an organisation?" So we'll keep asking questions and keep checking that they fit.

Then we need to bubble up those stories and make sure that we're making some changes as a result of what the team's telling us: at both the macro and micro-levels.



Paul

We're still early in our Joyous journey so it'll be really interesting for us to look back on what our people are saying after a full round of questions, later this year. We know that for us to get the most out of it we need to keep our people active and engaged in the tool, and over time we hope for it to just become part of what we do and how we work.

We're working and living in unusual and unprecedented circumstances with the covid pandemic, which is requiring us all to be adaptable and flexible - so it's great to have a tool that can do the same. I have no doubt that our Joyous journey will change and evolve, but it's one that as a company I think we can be excited about.



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