



joyous

Douglas Pharmaceuticals:

Making feedback a regular habit,
not an annual event.

Douglas Pharmaceuticals is a pharmaceutical manufacturing company headquartered in New Zealand, with sites in the USA and Fiji. Douglas has been operating since 1967 and now has a team of over 700 - ranging from senior executives to scientists to warehouse assistants.

When the Joyous project kicked off at Douglas, Ceri Rowland was only a few weeks into her role as Head of Organisational Development. Together with Victoria Hayward, Douglas HR Partner & Head of Employee Communications, she was determined to reinvent Douglas's traditional employee engagement survey with a totally novel approach.

Every time we met with Ceri and Victoria they bounded into reception all outstretched hands and big smiles, and this time was no different. We settled into a meeting room, and they launched into the story of building a culture of open feedback.

Using feedback to grow a culture of success

Douglas's People team wasn't just looking for another engagement survey. They wanted something different. Something that empowered people, not HR. They wanted insights into the company culture, as they were also working on building Douglas's **Culture of Success** program. They needed a tool that was easy for their diverse workforce to use, and that enabled their key target areas: real-time feedback, transparency and leadership behaviours.

Ceri and Victoria knew there had to be something much better than the underwhelming engagement surveys Douglas had sent out every year. "We had to do something different because otherwise we'd only get the same result with a different provider. We needed change."

The People team went out to the market with an RFP before engaging the Senior Leadership Team, talking to anonymous feedback vendors along with Joyous. And while Ceri was initially keen on Joyous, the open nature of the tool gave the team pause.

"We're in pharmaceuticals. Everything in the industry is about rules and regulations, and it can be traditional and conservative."

The People team had read the EX Genome that Joyous produced early in 2018, and shared it with their entire SLT before introducing the product. And they got further help from Joyous leaders in framing the benefits.



“Joyous was very provocative. They asked us to describe the culture we were trying to create and then explained how anonymous feedback contradicted everything we were trying to achieve.”

“If you’re trying to build an open, positive, thriving culture, why would you do it secretly?”

Douglas may not have set out to choose between an anonymous or open feedback tool, but Ceri and Victoria believe openness is 100% the biggest reason why Joyous has been successful there. “There’s no actual competition in the market for Joyous.”

Launching an untraditional tool in a very traditional environment

Because of the industry Douglas operates in, compliance is baked into the culture. But Victoria and Ceri made a concerted effort to move Joyous away from a compliance exercise; to encourage participation but not require it.

Ceri remembers having a conversation with the SLT on participation rates: “I told them we had 63% participation in the last survey, so I would be happy with 25% in Joyous, because that would be 25% of our people telling us the truth - and 25% of our people having better conversations with their leaders.”

The team ran 30 minute leader power-up sessions on Joyous, which ended up with over 80% leader participation. They also created a comprehensive FAQ which they distributed in as many team meetings as they could before launch.

When launch day came, the Douglas team had a big activation across all sites. “We played ping pong - because feedback goes two ways, so it was a play on that. We had chocolate, and I’m Happy was playing everywhere - it was awesome.”

“We wear the t-shirts every month.”



On the topic of t-shirts: demand is apparently out of control and the team have just put in another order. One shirt ended up on TV, and at the end of launch day the SLT were talking about getting Douglas t-shirts designed, and discussed relaxing the dress code. “Joyous just changes the whole mindset.”

Perhaps surprisingly, there’s been no resistance to people using their own devices to answer Joyous questions, despite initial concerns that may have been an issue. “I haven’t had a single piece of feedback from anyone saying ‘I can’t believe you’re sending me work on my personal phone.’”

While there are people who aren’t participating yet, and some who are a bit cautious about speaking their minds in an open forum, Ceri believes that this will change with time. “More people are getting involved and sharing their truth - and leaders are getting into the groove and building their confidence. We’re getting better every time.”

Unexpected benefits of open feedback: leadership capability uplift, deeper conversations

“What we love the most are the things we didn’t know we were going to get, or that we didn’t even know we were looking for.”

The two biggest unexpected Joyous benefits to Douglas were leadership capability uplift and better conversations. There’s been a huge uplift in people taking an interest in what their people are saying - and that goes beyond just the work in progress. It’s not just the ‘how is work going’ - it’s far deeper than that. It’s “how are you going?”

This leadership capability uplift is critical to Douglas: **Great Leaders and Great Conversations** is one of the pillars of the company’s culture of success. “If you’re a leader who’s open to conversation, who asks for feedback, and who does something with it, it makes a change. It’s powerful.”

One of the things that helps with this is the non-confrontational question design in Joyous. People aren’t asked to rate their leaders or review their performance; Joyous is designed around positive psychology, empowerment and enablement. Monthly drop-in sessions for leaders are continuing as well, helping managers know how to respond to feedback, what language to use, and how to hold productive conversations.

“We tell people this isn’t their leadership 360, it’s about how your people feel. Some of it you’re influencing and impacting, but not all of it. Don’t own the problems, lean in and have conversations about them.”

“We always talk about skipping the first 45 minutes of a meeting and getting straight into it, and Joyous gives you a platform to do that. Because you know who said what, you can have very specific and personalized conversations with your team members; that’s so different to any of the anonymous tools out there.”

Moving forward with Joyous

After completing a baseline survey, Douglas people are now responding to four questions every month, and feedback has been positive. While Ceri and Victoria acknowledge there might always be some people who don’t participate, most are having better conversations with their leaders as a result of Joyous. People who’ve previously struggled with their one-on-ones are now using Joyous feedback to frame those conversations.

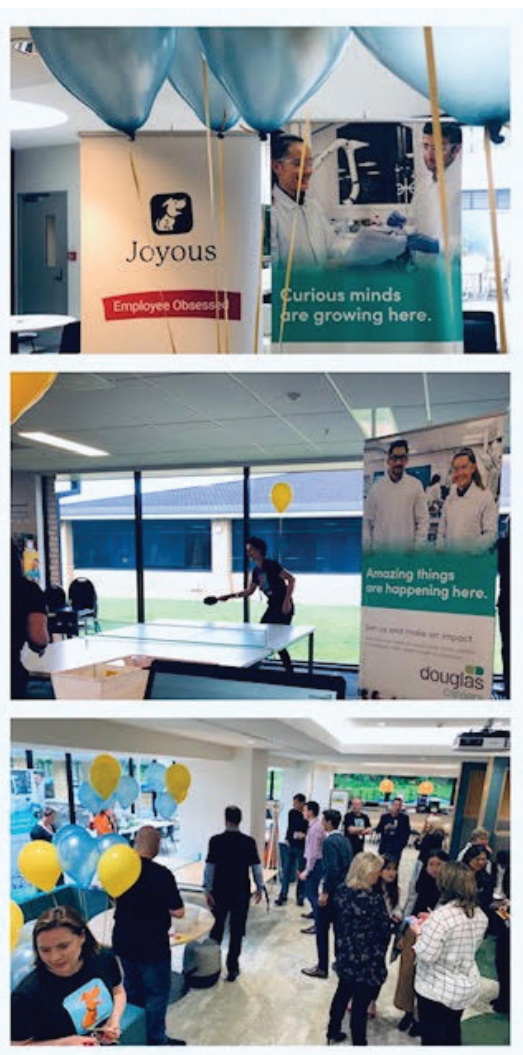
“It’s definitely empowering our people to have a voice. Joyous lays the foundations for a totally different kind of conversation.”

The Douglas team also really appreciates that Joyous has a broader employee experience (EX) focus and isn’t just engagement. “Engagement is only a third of your view, so why wouldn’t you want to see everything?” The team’s next big activation at Douglas is well-being, which is also covered by Joyous.

When it comes to launching open feedback, there are two things you absolutely have to get right

1. Take the time to get senior leaders on board before launching

There shouldn’t be any surprises: get them in a room and give them a chance to ask questions. We met with the senior



leadership team every week for six weeks before launch. And be honest! We didn't know how Joyous would go, so we made no promises. We knew what we had been doing wasn't working, and we knew everyone wanted to try something different, so we asked them to be open-minded and trust us. If it didn't work out, we'd be the first to say so. There was no risk.

2. Consistent communication is key

For launch we branded posters, t-shirts, and flyers. The executive team all came in their t-shirts and gave out chocolates and information sheets, and that material is available in our drop in sessions and on the intranet. We've gone out and asked everyone what they want to know about Joyous and now we have two or three pages of frequently asked questions. We came up with answers to every question anyone could possibly have. It's thorough!

While it's easy to put material on the company intranet, Ceri and Victoria also go out to production staff every month and talk to them about Joyous.

We are there and available. We don't ask people if they've 'done Joyous' because it isn't compulsory - we just check in and see if there have been any questions. Probably our most disengaged and low trust employees are the ones who aren't in front of computers. So we gown up, go down to manufacturing and packing, tell them Joyous is coming, answer their questions and make sure they have their links. It's important to make sure everyone has the chance to be involved.



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