The Solution — “HEAR”

The HR team and COH leadership felt so strongly about addressing the complexity problem and manager-employee relationship problem, they created a multi-faceted talent management program called “HEAR” — Houston Employee Assessment and Review. The acronym HEAR was purposeful in its focus on “hearing” and “communicating.” At the highest level, the HEAR goals focus on the employee-manager partnership, on-the-job success, and employee engagement and development.

The Challenges

The challenge City of Houston faced was a complex array of talent-related processes across 22 diverse city departments, combined with inconsistent, often ineffective, communication between managers and their team members. In addition, COH was experiencing an accelerating wave of retirements in the middle management ranks, with as much as 30% of the staff in certain departments reaching retirement age next year. All-in-all, it’s “dizzying” change, for sure.

City of Houston's holistic talent management components driving key organizational goals.
At the City of Houston, every person knows how their goals map directly to the mayor’s five pillars of success for the city (shown in the graphic above, with the central pillar being “Quality of Life” for residents). To reinforce that, COH wanted to create a bottom-up approach to communications. They felt they needed to get all the issues on the table so they could proactively solve them and reach an even higher level of success. Their philosophy is, “There’s no issue we can’t solve together. We just need to know what they are.”

Saba’s Talent Management Suite

The City of Houston chose Saba because of its deep foundation in learning (“the bridge to change” for COH) integrated tightly with performance, development plans and collaboration — all key elements in powering the HEAR program. And because it was engaging and intuitive to use for its 22,000 employees, the learning curve was very flat and the adoption curve was very steep. Plus, the Saba platform’s flexibility allowed COH to easily configure the system to meet its exact needs.
The Results to Date
Powered by Saba, the City of Houston’s HEAR program is seeing value in five key areas:

- More engaged city employees who understand where they fit in the mission of the city
- More productive employees as a result of clearer goals and better communications with their managers
- Better quality of service provided to city residents
- Increased revenue (taxes and fees) and decreased people costs (reduced turnover) — netting a 280% ROI
- A more positive city culture

Specifically, following the HEAR principles, employee performance has increased by approximately 10% (measured by an increased number of “4’s” and “5’s” on performance reviews relative to the previous year). As a result, service quality to residents has increased by an estimated 5%. The HEAR team is expecting similar or greater performance and quality gains in the next 12 months.

The impact of the City of Houston’s HEAR program was so profound that the City of Los Angeles asked the COH to help them launch LA HEAR and conduct “train-the-trainers” sessions to roll it out.

In fact, the City of Los Angeles has coined their hybrid model “CLEAR” — the City of LA Employee Assessment and Review — citing the need to ensure employees are CLEAR on how they measure success.

We felt it was important to fully empower our workforce by showing them what ‘success’ looks like for each employee.

Noel Pinnock
HEAR Liaison