

Learning, Growing, Empowering: The Employee Experience through the M&A Process

Keeping employees productive and maintaining morale during times of organizational change can be a formidable challenge. When a company goes through a major transition such as a merger or acquisition, retaining people who have been instrumental in the organization's success is crucial. We spoke to John Bureau, General Manager of Wynne Systems to reflect on employees' experiences as the company was acquired by the Volaris Group in May 2012. We also sat with Rick Bacchus of Volaris to learn about the process from his perspective.

Q: Talk about what the experience was like for Wynne employees after the acquisition.

John Bureau: Overall, our employees felt positively about the process. We communicated openly that the acquisition was underway, so everyone knew exactly what to expect. There were no surprises. The Volaris team, including CEO Mark Miller and Executive VP Rick Bacchus, spent time with the entire staff to ensure a smooth transition. For all the people we worked with from Volaris during the acquisition, we never received mixed messages. The goals and priorities for everything from finances to human resources were clear and consistent.

Q: Were changes made to personnel?

JB: We worked with Volaris to do a top-to-bottom personnel assessment. They spent a lot of time and energy reviewing people—it's very important to them. We shifted a few employees to different departments and also created several new positions to bring in new talent. Volaris made suggestions, but when it came to making final decisions, it was up to us. In the end, we kept all employees and not a single person left the organization. There was no requirement to reduce staff from an expense standpoint.

Q: How does Volaris help create opportunities for employee growth?

JB: Volaris firmly believes that a company's ability to succeed is based upon the people in the organization. They truly believe in investing in people. Standout employees across all Volaris companies are recognized and given new opportunities in their own or other organizations. From a training and professional development standpoint, there are many opportunities for growth. Every discipline—marketing as just one example—has a best practice opportunity. Volaris facilitates everything from online communities among the various disciplines all the way to in-person events. Wynne also participates in the Volaris Academy, an annual event in which all companies come together for financial education sessions, business competitions, and shared learning. These are not opportunities we had prior to joining Volaris, and I can't emphasize enough how valuable these experiences have been both for our staff and for our business as whole.

Q: Was there a "culture shock" after the acquisition took place?

JB: The day-to-day culture didn't change much compared to when Wynne was owned by United Rentals. However, Volaris is very disciplined, which has been a positive driver for us. They want everybody within the organization to understand how Volaris looks at software companies financially, and how decisions are made. And they believe that all employees should have skin in the game based on financial performance, so we have a program to encourage that sense of responsibility. The guidance Volaris has given us has proven to be very profitable. After just three years, Wynne currently performs at the highest level of financial metrics by Volaris' standards. I am confident that if you ask any Wynne employee, they would say we are a stronger, more focused organization than we were three years ago when we first joined the Volaris Group. That's something we're very proud of.

Q: As far as employees are concerned, what's Volaris approach during an acquisition?

Rick Bacchus: The “people” side of an acquisition is very important to Volaris. We believe strongly in empowering all levels of staff. It's never about coming in and dictating how a business should be run. Each company has a deep knowledge of their market, personnel and customers. What we look to do is set broad strokes based on operating metrics and financial performance standards that apply to all Volaris companies. With that baseline established, we give the management team and employees room to make the decisions that drive their businesses forward.

Q: How do you go about communicating with employees at the company that's being acquired?

RB: One of the things that makes us unique is that we're very open about a company's performance. We completely share the financials, talk about the challenges ahead and what we see on the ground. Then we create development plans with the staff that's coming on board. It's a very participatory and cooperative process, which in turn helps build trust and enhance working relationships.

Q: How does Volaris approach talent review?

RB: We have a talent management process that is standard across all Volaris companies. It's something we do every year. The purpose of our talent management process is to give both Volaris and the local management team a further opportunity to understand each employees' role, how they fit into the organization, and establish scorecard or performance goals for the coming year. We at Volaris also have a set of core values and we expect all employees across all organizations to embrace these values.

Q: What does Volaris do to encourage professional development and provide opportunities for growth?

RB: We help create and maintain an environment that enables our employees to continually perform at the best of their abilities. If there is an employee who can benefit from an increased scope or added responsibilities in a different role within Volaris, we help identify those opportunities to allow for individual growth and development. It's one way of retaining our high-potential talent. Furthermore, Volaris facilitates a number of corporate seminars and events to allow employees from our different companies to discuss and identify best practices while learning from each other. At Volaris, we empower our people to achieve and surpass their goals.