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THE LESSONS OF SMALL BUSINESS BEGINNINGS

A CPO's Years in Small Business and the Tips That Could Make a Difference for a Team of Any Size

Patti reflects on her experiences with talent in small businesses and shares her must-know tips for burgeoning teams.

PATTI HUSKA
Chief people officer (CPO) at American Express Global Business Travel (GBT)

1

What is your role at GBT and what attracted you to a career as a chief people officer?

I'm the chief people officer for American Express Global Business Travel. My first job was at a small business temp agency. I couldn't type to save my life, so they asked me if I would come in and check applicants and place people in temp assignments. It was fantastic because I got exposure to wearing so many hats. I gained incredible experience and an overview of basically what it's like to own a small business. I came to understand the different aspects of what it's like to manage an employment payment process, which really piqued my interest in HR.

2

What exposure have you had with small businesses either personally or in a working environment?

I wouldn't be where I am at today if it weren't for the foundation that I built in my first two jobs working for small businesses. Although I was focused on employment, I had to be keenly aware of the financials. It taught me phenomenal discipline and principles – like spend every dollar like it's your own, have a great work ethic, and be a great team player – that I still use today. Working for small businesses gave me exposure to every aspect of the organization. It made me feel like I was much closer to the heartbeat of the company. The exposure and experiences formed a lot of what I use in my career today.

3

In your view, what is the importance of emerging businesses to the economy and everyday life?

Small businesses are important across the board. If you look from an economic standpoint, they really are the engine of the economy. If you look at the challenges we've had through COVID, you see the support in communities around small businesses and people very much rallying around local employers. And then if you think about innovation and the next great ideas, there is a lot that comes out of the small business space. I am fortunate that in the greater Boston area, we have a lot of start-ups in the tech and biology space. There is a phenomenal entrepreneurial flavor that comes from small businesses.

4

If you could give a business five tips, what would they be?

1. Be an organization that is easy to do business with – easy for your external customers to work with and be an employer that's easy to work for. Strive for a seamless employee experience with a focus on having the right tools in place like Neo1 for spend management. There is always a war for talent. Employees want systems and processes that are easy to work with.
2. Focus on culture. We all spend so much time at work, to a degree, your job becomes a part of who you are.
3. Hire people who embody passion, flexibility, and collaboration. They'll help keep your business going.

4. Localize and empower your employees to make good decisions. This comes back to making sure you have good systems in place. Even in global or multinational organizations today, teams do not have the luxury of extra departments or teams who can sort through complicated travel and expense policies and tracking. Employees need tools that are automated and easy to use. It's important to empower your employees to be successful.
5. Have a clear definition of your employee value proposition. Attracting the best and quality employees is a challenge for any organization. You may not have the benefit of a college campus, internship programs, etc. Have a clear definition of the value that you can provide an employee. Then have tools to help alleviate manual and administrative work so you can focus on growing your business.

5

Any final thoughts to share?

I recently did a career day at Boston Latin School, the oldest school in the US. I was fascinated by how the entrepreneurial spirit has taken hold today. There was one student who really impressed me. He followed up with me and said, "I want to start my own business. It's my passion." That mindset used to be rare.

Learn More

For more information about the Neo1 platform that helps manage employee spend for small to medium businesses, American Express Global Business Travel (GBT), and the services we offer, visit www.amexglobalbusinesstravel.com/neo1/

