

Investors in People: how continuous coaching helped Acorn to achieve accreditation

In conversation with **Emily Meredith**,
Group Head of HR, Acorn Recruitment



The customer

Acorn Recruitment is one of the UK's leading recruitment companies, employing 170 people across 40 nationwide offices. The company recruits talent into temporary, permanent and contract positions, and provides high-street and specialist recruitment services to a variety of sectors, including construction and engineering, transport, IT, finance, and life sciences.

In October 2022, the Acorn team celebrated its recent Investors in People (IIP) accreditation - an achievement that Emily attributes, in part, to the company's engagement with **OpenBlend**.

The challenge

But let's rewind for a moment and look at why Acorn partnered with OpenBlend in the first place.

Reflecting on what was previously an inconsistent approach to performance management, Emily says: "Some of our employees never missed a one-to-one while others hadn't had one in years. The performance reviews that did take place were also very manager-driven and task orientated."

The existing set-up also made it difficult to record employees' objectives and track progress over time – something that was made even more challenging "due to the paper and intranet-based methods that managers were using to track conversations."

Adding to these issues was the fact that managers were often failing to communicate how their employees' objectives were tied to those of their team and the wider business - a lack of clarity that, in some cases, was diminishing the fundamental purpose and meaning behind their goals.

Perhaps most significantly, employees were not receiving the regular coaching they needed to progress and achieve high performance.

Case study



The objectives

Towards the beginning of 2021, the Acorn team decided to retire the existing performance management model in favour of one that would support continuous coaching and enable people to thrive at work.

It was a vision that came with six key objectives:

- 1 Create greater value for managers and employees by moving to a continuous performance and coaching-led model.
- 2 Help managers to ensure relevant goal-setting for Acorn's remote and hybrid workforce.
- 3 Drive consistency through a performance framework but recognise that one size does not fit all by supporting tailored performance conversations that speak to the individual.
- 4 Enable employees to identify what motivates them so that reward can be aligned to what matters most to the individual.
- 5 Access real-time data to power people and performance strategy and drive more informed decision-making.
- 6 Provide a meaningful and relevant framework to underpin the People Pathway (Acorn's career progression plan).

Why OpenBlend?

As a previous user and advocate of OpenBlend, Acorn's newly appointed MD arranged a demo for Emily, who recalls seeing **"the immediate synergies between what the company was trying to achieve and OpenBlend's ability to support that journey."**

But what impressed her most about the platform?

"So much really. It's simple and easy to use, and actually that's the real beauty of it. We also loved that it would enable every individual to create their own blend and

express, for the first time, what matters most to them." Emily also cites OpenBlend's **"brilliant reporting functionality"** and ability to track wellbeing over time as key factors in the decision to engage.

With the partnership confirmed, attention turned to communicating the benefits of OpenBlend to Acorn's managers and employees, and training them in how to get the best out of the technology. This collaborative effort took place towards the end of 2021 before the platform was rolled out to all employees in January 2022.

Case study

The benefits

Less than a year in, the partnership is already showing huge signs of success.

Consistently high engagement points to the value that the platform is delivering; more and more employees are setting the agendas for their own one-to-ones; and conversations are now centred around individual coaching and development needs.

An Acorn employee and OpenBlend user said “The OpenBlend sessions are amazing. We can tailor the discussion to whatever we want to talk about [and] I can suggest courses that I’m interested in.”

For Emily, though, the biggest benefit is this: “We’re finding that people are progressing more quickly than they were before and that’s due to them having more regular and more open conversations around wellbeing and the things that motivate them.”



	Pre-OpenBlend	One year in...
Engagement (logins)	N/A	<p>99% of employees have engaged with the platform since launch</p> <p>64% have engaged at least once every month over the last year</p> <p>92% have engaged at least once every quarter over the last year</p>
Sessions (one-to-ones)	One-to-ones were held sporadically and there was no consistent means of tracking them.	<p>85% of employees have now used OpenBlend to facilitate a one-to-one</p> <p>894 sessions in 2022 (current employees)</p> <p>1064 ‘High Five’ recognitions in 2022</p>
Objectives	Just 52% of employees had open objectives in the first weeks after launch	73% of employees have open objectives with an average of 5 goals each
Wellbeing	Average wellbeing score was 70% in the first weeks after launch	Wellbeing now sits at 76% (an increase of 5 percentage points in less than a year)

Case study

The journey to Investors in People accreditation

The data shows the huge progress made in a short space of time, but the story doesn't stop there.

OpenBlend recently formed a key part of Acorn's application for Investors in People accreditation – a status awarded to only the most people-centric organisations.

Talking about the company's journey to accreditation – a process that involved polling all employees and

then conducting a series of in-depth interviews with a smaller group, Emily says: "We had an 80% response rate on the initial survey, which was phenomenal and I think that was indicative of our people wanting to recognise the positive steps that have been made to support them at work over the past year."

As part of the application, Emily also gave a demo of the platform to Investors in People and spoke about the coaching benefits that OpenBlend has created for people across the business. Explaining that she'd never seen anything like it before, and having also collected positive feedback from managers and employees, it's fair to say the assessor was impressed:



"People are really positive about the OpenBlend sessions, they enjoy the opportunity for one-to-ones as well as the chance to tailor discussions to suit circumstance"

Investors in People Practitioner



To learn more about the OpenBlend platform and how it can support conversations in your organisation, get in touch.

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