



SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

Het Poetsbureau -
Connecting
in Coronatimes



INTERVIEW WITH HET POETSBUREAU

BEST WORKPLACE, ALSO IN CORONATIMES

Even in Covid times, Best Workplaces™ 2021 managed to be great employers! They created a culture of trust and continued to seek connection with their employees. They turned the crisis into an opportunity, an opportunity to let their employees shout even louder from the rooftops how proud they are of their organisation.

We interviewed our special award winner for Connecting in Corona-times, Het Poetsbureau! Kathy De Bruyne & Renate Nelis – HR Director & Marketing & Communication Director - explain how they connected with their employees this past year.



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 FAMILY TO A MORE DIGITAL FAMILY.
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WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL STRATEGY AROUND THE THEME OF CONNECTEDNESS AND HOW DID IT HELP IN DEALING WITH THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

At Het Poetsbureau, we want to be connected in our business as one big family. That is our starting point. That was already the case before Corona and, off course, we wanted to maintain this during Corona. We want to make sure we develop strong bonds in and across all layers of the organisation. Following the previous Trust Index®, in 2020, we decided that next to connection, communication was our point of focus. 2020 was going to be the year of family and of communication. Not only giving information but also asking questions and listening.

We had a lot of good intentions but then.... Corona came along. And suddenly, we could not be this large family that was together physically. Now what?!

“We set up pulse surveys to give people a voice and to get a view on their needs.”

Very quickly we made the transition from a physical family to a more digital family. We tried to communicate in a lot of different ways, through different channels but still involving all employees as much as possible.

WHICH NEW WAYS TO CONNECT HAVE YOU CREATED FOLLOWING CORONA?

To move towards this digital family, we changed all the meetings to digital ones and kept on doing what we were doing. **No meetings were skipped.** When the first lockdown started, we even had a digital meeting once a day with the direction committee to stay connect and discuss our strategy.

Apart from the digital way to meeting each other, our marketing and communication teams were very creative to come up with new channels as well. **The digital newsletter** was published more regularly, not only in Dutch, but also in French and English, to keep employees up to date.



HET POETSBUREAU in a nutshell

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 Employees at Het Poetsbureau are called stars

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 Het Poetsbureau wants to do things ‘differently and better’

■
 They want to de-worry their employees and want to excell at doing so



www.hetpoetsbureau.be

EVERY DAY WE LISTENED, WE LISTENED TO PEOPLE WHO HAD QUESTIONS, WHO WERE WORRIED.

All communication was done in Dutch, French and English so we were sure everyone could understand it, without our consultants having to step in.

To gain speed and keep everyone in the loop, we started gathering the e-mail addresses we did not have yet. That way as many people as possible could be reached digitally.

We want all communications that we do to reflect our family feeling. We offer space for interaction, for questions, for little compliments, ... We used different platforms to spread our messages: through our website, a FAQ page, the newsletter, ... Moreover, we built a new **intranet platform** for the office workers.

Next to this, we set up several things to ask employees' feedback. We set up **pulse surveys** to give people a voice and to get a view on their needs. When we were deciding whether or not to start our cleaning services back up, for example, we first asked our employees 'are you up for that?'. Finally, we also had a **Corona emergency number**, a helpline, where people could call with their worries or questions.

Covid automatically brought with it a different kind of feeling of belonging. We felt connected following the fact that we were all worried and uncertain about the future, in different ways. **We realised, in order for people to continue to feel secure and to maintain that bond with us, we must also give them the opportunity to express that concern to us, and to do so through a personal channel.** Every day we listened, we listened to people who had questions, who were worried.

In the early days, we noticed that the line was ringing red hot. The quieter the media, the quieter the coronal line. And at other times it was huge again.

"We want every communication that we do to reflect our family feeling."



How did Het Poetsbureau keep the connection with their employees?

- 1. A clear focus on communication and connection helped them to keep the family feeling alive
- 2. They kept communicating in different ways: from a digital newsletter to personal movies made by the CEO's
- 3. They kept listening by means of pulse surveys and a GPtW committee
- 4. Specific to Corona they set up a Corona emergency number that employees could use to get an answer to their question.
- 5. They built on the foundation of trust, on the values of appreciation and respect

Thanks to the Corona emergency number we learned a lot. From what people were feeling to what we needed to work on. **People felt that we understood them. That created a feeling of connection.**

We linked our communication to the safety councils. When they took certain decisions, we immediately translated these to 'what does this mean for you?'.

WHAT WAS THE REACTION OF YOUR EMPLOYEES TO YOUR APPROACH?

The results of the survey speak for themselves. The results went up. We communicated well and focused on connecting with our people.

We set up a GPtW committee for our white collar employees, in which we specifically asked: 'how do you think we are doing?'. We ask feedback and also look towards the future together 'How will we approach things post Corona?'. **We have created an environment where people feel safe to answer our questions candidly.**

HOW DID YOU FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL CONNECTION?

The connection was largely digital. As soon as it was possible, we did try to put a physical element back into it. The Christmas tour, for example, at the end of the year when our Operations Director went to visit all the different offices. We did so, very strictly with mouth-masks and gels, within the strict parameters that were possible. But still, **people were so happy to have that physical contact again.**

That is also something we very consciously focused on in our communication. From the moment it is safe again and we can get back together as a family, then we will immediately switch back to that and look for the best way forward in the future.

HET POETSBUREAU IS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS FUN PARTIES, WHAT WAS IT LIKE DURING THE CORONA YEAR?

It's true, everyone is waiting for a fun party (laughs). **We don't party for the sake of partying, of course, it is always an underlying reason to show our gratitude and appreciation and to keep the connection of the warm family alive.** And of course, it is a nice way to do it.

At first, the idea was to postpone festivities for a while because in the beginning we didn't know how everything would evolve. But when it became clear that the situation was long term, we didn't want to postpone everything. We continued to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, for example. We sent birthday cards and we made sure that people could collect their presents in a safe way in the office. For those celebrating anniversaries, we set up a digital celebration. We sent them a package in advance. Where there was normally a reception, there was now a snack and drink and a surprisebox. There was still room to have a chat, to raise a glass and to **let employees know: we have not forgotten you and what your years of service have meant for us.**

IN WHAT WAY HAVE YOUR CORPORATE VALUES PLAYED A ROLE IN THIS APPROACH?

If you look at our values, **appreciation and respect are extremely important to us.** We still focused on this, but gave them a digital interpretation. **We tried to add personal touches,** for example, when we distributed certain things, to include a card, ... Extra moments were inserted for feedback, for questioning and for setting up surveys. **Continuing to work from our values is key, now and in the future.**

We have continued to show that appreciation and respect for the fact that people continued working in difficult circumstances. Jo and Elly, our CEO's, have often emphasised this explicitly in the movies they have made to communicate with the employees.

For our staff, to feel this acknowledgement is especially important. We never minimised anything in terms of dangers, in terms of risks. And when it was necessary, we took action. At a certain point we closed our company, we didn't have to close it, but we did it out of respect for our employees.



WHAT HAS THIS PAST YEAR TAUGHT YOU FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT WILL YOU TAKE WITH YOU AND WHAT NOT?

From a marketing point of view, digital has of course brought with it that lever of speed. That has made it possible for us to be very quick on the uptake and to change gear very quickly. We also learned that if personal contact disappears, multilingual communication for our target groups is really important, in order to make sure that the message is conveyed correctly. Previously it was mainly the interpersonal contact that took care of this.

From an HR point of view, we learned that you can also create solidarity by showing people the necessary respect, a way of helping and sufficiently extending a hand when things are very difficult. Offering a listening ear. That creates a certain feeling of solidarity. Our employees know that they are not alone.

Sometimes we wrestled with the question: what should we communicate and what shouldn't we talk about? We did not want to create unrest, just the opposite of course, we wanted to take it away. But you still must address the issues. You must find the balance between what to say and what not to say. **At a certain point, realised that transparency and vulnerability were key. Even if you cannot say very much, tell employees that you do not know yet either, that you are still in the dark, that you have doubts.** Then you have that feeling of solidarity again, because they feel the same. **You build trust because employees know you are there for them to support them.**

We see that this period weighs very heavily on people's mental attitude. Before Corona, we had already set up a project namely the **well-being coach.** Thanks to this, initiative, staff members can consult a psychologist whenever they feel the need. We were very grateful that we had set it up in the past so that we could offer people extra support at times when they were really struggling and wanted extra help. **It was great that this initiative already existed and that it was also easier for people to take that step. In this way, we could also show them again: you are indeed not alone and it is normal if things are not going well for a while, but we are going to help you to make sure that you feel better.**

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IF YOU LOOK AT OUR VALUES: APPRECIATION AND RESPECT ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO US

WE LOOKED FOR A FUN ELEMENT IN EVERY TEAM MEETING, THAT MAY TAKE 15 MINUTES BUT THAT ALSO CREATES CONNECTION



WE HAVE TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE ORGANISATION AND THE EMPLOYEES, BUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES, HOW DID YOU TRY TO MAINTAIN THAT?

Each manager took a bit of a lead in that. For example, we had daily stand-ups in some teams where one would coordinate with their team every morning because everyone was working from home. **There have been various touch points, both within the formal framework as well as informal moments**, such as the Christmas drinks, the Christmas party, etc., that were simply translated digitally.

The informal conversations at the coffee machine between the various departments are no longer there, but **we have motivated people to call someone from another department in order to keep in touch**. These are things that have been digitised.

Through our social channels, these are things that are very much alive. Every now and then, we place a call for people to give us tips on, for example, on working from home with children, what are you going to cook this weekend, where did you go for a walk, ... In this way,

we also stimulate and facilitate people to keep in touch with each other.

Obviously, we also work with a chat function. Throughout the day you see colleagues connecting with each other and asking each other questions. That's obvious, but that's also how they feel connected. A part from this, we have a Whatsapp group per team. People share what they have done over the weekend, etc. This was not used very much before, but since Corona, it is really hot.

Another thing is to **ensure that there is a fun element** in every team meeting. Someone will provide a quiz, share spectacular experiences from the past week, etc. That may take 15 minutes, but that is the connection you have outside of work. You can have a good laugh and then get down to business!

Do you also want to follow in the footsteps of Het Poetsbureau?! Be sure to go to www.greatplaceto-work.be to find out more about our way of working and the ways we can support you in your journey towards an even better workplace!