



Starbucks: Offering a top-valued benefit with Lyra



Ron Crawford, Senior Vice President, Global Total Rewards, Starbucks

The senior vice president of global total rewards isn't typically someone you'd expect to find working behind the counter at Starbucks, but that's exactly where you can find Ron Crawford once a month. And while he's not authorized to make drinks, "I get the opportunity to sweep and take out the garbage," he joked. He says the most important part of his shift is listening to the store's employees, who they call partners.

"One of the key tenets for us is listening to our partners, which takes a variety of formats from surveys, to focus groups, to personal emails, to stopping me in our headquarters hallway, to spending a half day working in our stores. The listening is constant," said Crawford.

This emphasis on listening has made a huge impact on Starbucks' industry-leading benefits package. Since 2011, Crawford has pioneered some of the company's most innovative and popular benefits, such as the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, Lyra and Spotify partnerships, and the groundbreaking expansion of benefits for transgender partners.

"If I was ever going to leave a successful consulting career, it was never going to be for any company other than Starbucks, because I'd seen the way that we integrate our benefits offering into the core of our business. To this day, I literally still jump out of bed to go to work every morning. It's important work for me, and it's been a really good career journey," said Crawford.

CHALLENGE

Starbucks heard growing frustrations with their previous EAP surrounding stigma, access, and quality. "There's a stigma that prevents people from getting access to mental health care, then you can't get an appointment for eight weeks, and often those therapists aren't delivering high-quality outcomes," Crawford noted.

SOLUTION

Starbucks launched Lyra in April 2020 to address the mental health challenges of its partners. Lyra has grown to be one of the most valued benefits for Starbucks baristas around the U.S.

IMPACT

99%

of Starbucks employees are instantly matched with a provider

96%

average satisfaction rate of Starbucks employees who engage with Lyra

Starbucks journey with mental health

A traditional EAP couldn't solve Starbucks' mental health challenges.

"In 2019, anxiety and depression were popping up as more of an issue for our partners than ever before. What we found is that we have a dysfunctional mental health system in this country. At the core, it just doesn't work. We actually stopped our bid for a new EAP when we realized that we needed a brand new solution," said Crawford. "That's when we found Lyra. It was very intriguing to us because Lyra went after the core of the mental health problem."

A strong communication campaign was necessary to push the benefit to baristas who don't have access to a computer.

Starbucks launched its partnership with Lyra during the opening days of the pandemic. "The mental health of our people was so important," he said. "We had just launched Lyra, and we pushed on the accelerator and started a massive communication campaign about the benefit. We communicated the heck out of it and used it as a business tool to get our people back to where they needed to be, so that we could open our stores and serve our communities. It was a really challenging time. I feel very fortunate that we launched with Lyra, and we definitely used every single part of Lyra that we possibly could to help us get back on top of our business."

Lyra is the No. 2 favorite benefit of Starbucks baristas.

"Our store managers need to hire people constantly, and they use those chalkboards you see out front to get people to apply. You'll often see Lyra listed on there as an advertised benefit, next to things like a free subscription to Spotify and the wage rate," Crawford explained. "It's wonderful how much they love the benefit and how strong Lyra is in their minds."

An emphasis on culturally responsive care was crucial for serving Starbucks' diverse employee population.

"We have an incredibly diverse population within our company and within all of our stores all over the country," he noted. "It was very important for us to respond and reflect back that diversity in the solution that we deliver to our people—one of which is making sure that the Lyra population of therapists is diverse itself with options for race, gender, ethnicity, etc. Lyra has done that for us."

Starbucks continues to evolve its partnership with Lyra.

"By no means are we done with the mental health issue," said Crawford. "We're looking for more and more Lyra. We've seen in Lyra the commitment to continually evolving the platform. For example, we now have Lyra Learn, which is video-based training. We're constantly looking for those opportunities to remind everyone of the program and reach more people."

The final word from Ron Crawford:

"We have proven to ourselves that this works. If you make an investment in your people, they will invest in your customers, and will return better business results. We know this to our core."



[Watch more videos of Ron Crawford sharing Starbucks' journey with mental health here.](#)