



EEO TRUST
Work & Life Bulletin
December 2007

- 02 Manufacturers leverage benefits of work-life balance
- 04 Focus on health – retaining precious staff
- 06 News – flexible working legislation
- 07 Latest research

Manufacturers leverage benefits of work-life balance

Like most business sectors, manufacturers face challenges with an ageing workforce, skills shortages and growing demand for flexible work options. While their working environments and shiftwork constraints pose challenges, work-life initiatives can be instrumental in creating a supportive and attractive workplace.

Genesis Energy and Steelbro both entered this year's EEO Trust Work & Life Awards, demonstrating through their innovative and extensive initiatives that work-life balance is not just for white collar workers.

Genesis Energy is a leading energy company in New Zealand. The state-owned enterprise was formed in 1999 from the break up of the Electricity Corporation of New Zealand. It operates renewable and thermal electricity generation and is the largest gas and electricity retailer in the country with more than 700,000 customer accounts.

Genesis Energy employs more than 470 permanent staff. It out-sources call-centre and some IT services. Staff are based in six centres across the North Island. Since 1999, customer numbers have increased by about 600,000 and employee numbers have doubled.

The demographics of its workforce vary markedly in different parts of the business. For example, employees at the generation plants at Huntly, Tokaanu and Waikaremoana are predominantly male and many have been with Genesis Energy or its predecessor for 20 years or more. In contrast, the retail business and corporate offices in Auckland, Wellington and Hamilton employ a younger workforce with a median age of 34, and also have more female staff and higher staff turnover.

The ethnic diversity of staff is growing, reflecting changes in the local population. Skills shortages in specific areas like engineering have been addressed by recruiting a number of people from overseas.

Voluntary staff turnover at Genesis Energy is low, as is absenteeism but the



Children enjoy a day out at Huntly Power Station.

company recognises it needs to look to the future. In addition the company, like many others, faces the challenges of an ageing workforce in some areas and has to ensure strategies for retention, recruitment and succession are targeted and effective.

Many employees at the generation sites are highly skilled in specialist areas and would be difficult to replace. Different issues dominate in the retail business and corporate services. These areas have grown rapidly and face challenges around a younger workforce with more people taking parental leave or being lured by overseas travel.

An alternative working programme is being developed by the HR team to meet the needs of people requiring more flexible working options, including older workers. Currently, staff nearing retirement may be offered reduced working hours or their role may be adapted to ensure that any physical challenges of the role are reduced. People returning from parental leave are offered some flexibility and staff who travel overseas are encouraged to return to Genesis Energy after their overseas work experience.

Alternative working may include traditional things like changed hours of work but also encompasses the work environment and benefits programme.

The terms and conditions of employment with Genesis Energy reflect the company's trust in employees. It offers unlimited sick leave and some flexibility with special leave.

In 2006, Genesis Energy introduced a benefits programme which was designed to be flexible to suit younger employees and to meet the concerns of older workers. The package includes subsidised superannuation options including KiwiSaver, subsidised health insurance, income protection insurance, life insurance and trauma insurance, an interactive wellness programme and subsidies for the preparation of wills and enduring power of attorney.

Health and safety issues are critical on the generation sites and have driven a broader wellness programme. This includes a counsellor visiting these sites to support all staff, particularly shift workers who face additional challenges due to their working hours. An external counsellor is available to all staff for work and personal issues through the

business's EAP programme.

Annual health checks are offered to all staff, and men's and women's health seminars are conducted at sites. A 10,000 Steps Challenge helped motivate staff to keep fit and an intranet page is devoted to ideas on staying fit and healthy.

While Christchurch firm Steelbro is much smaller than Genesis Energy and operates from only one site, it too is facing up to the challenges posed by an ageing workforce and demand for flexible working options. Steelbro employs 105 staff to manufacture and market container handling equipment. It has been a family business for four generations and is now in its 130th year. The company started as coach builders and now holds 30-40% of the global market in sidelifter equipment. It exports worldwide, with Steelbro sidelifters operating in more than 100 countries.

Around two-thirds of Steelbro staff are involved in manufacturing. They include welders, fitters, mechanics and other trades on the factory floor. The remaining third are office-based. Staff are aged from 17 to 69, with seven staff over 65. Only 11 are women. The plant operates five days a week, with occasional Saturday work during heavy production periods.

The specialised nature of Steelbro's product requires a heavy investment in staff training. Retention is all-important. "There's a real scarcity of some of the skills we need to run this business so there's always been an incentive to work with staff to retain them as long as possible," says CEO Steve Humphries.

Steelbro has built its worldwide reputation on high quality workmanship and excellent customer support. It is committed to giving its customers the best possible product and needs experienced people to make that happen and to continue to support it.

"Imagine if you're a technician in Christchurch trying to diagnose a machinery malfunction in Guam over a bad phone line with someone whose English isn't great. It requires a great deal of product knowledge to provide that kind of support," says Steve.

He says Steelbro has the capability and the technical expertise to compete with anyone in the world, "Constant innovation, kiwi ingenuity and key strategic alliances have enabled the company to build on

its past successes and enter new and exciting markets."

Steelbro's business success was recognised recently in the Champion Canterbury Awards where it won both the Global Operator and Supreme Awards for medium/large enterprises.

Steve says the company never deliberately set out to develop work-life initiatives. "They just came out of the need and desire to look after people and retain good staff. It's more about values than policy."

"Being a family owned and operated business, family values have always been strong for Steelbro. We appreciate that people are not replaceable resources and have a culture of working with staff to accommodate their needs in a co-operative way."

The company has a flexible approach to work-life balance, including staged return to work from parental leave and reduction in hours for some of the staff who are over 65. Between them, these older staff have 230 years experience at Steelbro. This wealth of knowledge is too important to lose so the company works with each person to determine what they need. In some cases, this means working three to four days a week, in others, working shorter hours each day.

For example, Barbara Anderson has been PA to the CEO at Steelbro for 32 years. When her children were small she worked 9am-1pm and had the school holidays off. Now they are grown up and her daughter lives in the US so she works 9am-4pm five days a week and takes six weeks off every year to visit her daughter and grandchildren.

Kelvin Duncan is 69 and has worked with Steelbro for 23 years. He holds a key role in quality assurance and has extensive knowledge of Steelbro's products. Not quite ready to retire but wanting to enjoy the benefits of more time at home with his family, he now works three days a week.

Some of the other over 65's have opted to continue to work full-time for now but are clear that if they wish to cut their hours, the company will be willing to accommodate them.

Women returning from parental leave are encouraged to take the time they need to return to work. "We want these women to return to work at their own

pace," says Steve Humphries.

One example is Lillian Pullan who worked full-time until she had her first child seven years ago. She now works 18 hours a week and is delighted with the arrangement. "When I discussed it with Steve, it was clear the emphasis was on what would work for me," she says. "I'm happy with how things have worked out."

Steelbro is also flexible around children's needs. People whose jobs allow them to work remotely are encouraged to stay at home to support a sick partner rather than come to work and worry. It is not unheard of for the odd workaholic to be sent home under orders.

All Steelbro's managers are fathers with young children and Steve says there is a shared understanding of the importance of family. "For them, support means knowing they won't be thought any less of if they need to be with their kids at home from time to time and this sets a good example to the rest of the workforce."

Other work-life initiatives include flexible working hours, job-sharing, options for part-time work and long-term leave. "If people wish to take extended holidays, we make every effort to accommodate them."

For Steelbro, work-life initiatives seem to pay off. "It's difficult for us to provide data as we've never been any other way so there are no before and after figures," says Steve. "What we can say is that overall, staff retention is over 85% and the average tenure for production staff is seven years. These are stand-out figures in the heavy manufacturing sector."

Documentation Manager at Steelbro, Maryanne Cathro, who prepared Steelbro's entry into the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards, says it was only as she prepared the entry that the company realised how exceptional it was. "As a former contractor I have worked in a lot of companies and Steelbro struck me from the start as an amazing place to work. They had always taken their approach to work-life balance for granted and it was only through preparing the entry that they realised that how we work is quite something!"

Focus on health – retaining precious staff

For three organisations working in the health sector, the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards provided the incentive to describe their very special approaches to supporting their staff to do their best in challenging and demanding environments in a sector where skilled staff are in very short supply.

Staff retention is a particularly demanding issue for district health boards but an approach to career development taken in the Bay of Plenty has been so successful in retaining and motivating staff that other DHBs are adopting it.

Average staff turnover for district health boards is about 20% annually and, while the Bay of Plenty DHB is doing better at 12%, it is determined to retain its staff for longer, particularly as nurses are an ageing population.

“The job market is becoming increasingly competitive and we needed to ensure we have advantages that put us ahead of other health sector employers,” says CEO Phil Cammish. “Research shows that career development is extremely important to people when they decide where to work and how long to stay.”

The Bay of Plenty DHB employs 2800 people, including 1230 nurses and nurse care assistants and 210 specialists and doctors. They serve a population of 200,000 stretching from Waihi Beach to Cape Runaway in the east and including Kawerau and Murupara.

In 2004, the board initiated a pilot career development programme. “At that time no other major health organisation in New Zealand employed a full-time careers adviser to deliver career development services to its employees,” says Phil Cammish. “As far as we can tell, this programme was the first of its kind in New Zealand. We developed it on a shoe-string budget and it’s attracted a lot of interest nationally and internationally.”

The programme invites all employees to refer themselves to the Career Development Adviser for a career consultation, either individually or as a group. They learn about the career development process and work through a

Career Discovery workbook. The workbook encourages participants to focus on their career goals by assessing their experience, interests and life goals, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

Participants gather the information for the workbook using a range of resources such as a software programme to identify personality type and preferred skills and options, card-sorts to understand their needs and the book *Do What You Are* to interpret personality types in a careers context. This also helps identify work-related strengths and areas for development.

The second consultation is a more in-depth meeting with the Career Development Adviser to fine-tune career planning, discuss options, set goals and identify support networks and resources.

Over 500 people in the Bay of Plenty DHB have completed the programme, with some sessions held outside core business hours to accommodate shift workers.

Before the programme started, the DHB found that half of its employees were not confident in making career choices, two-thirds were unsure of the career choices available to them and 40% were uncertain what roles were suited to them.

After receiving Career Development support:

- 98% of employees were confident in making career choices
- 100% were aware of the information and support available to help with career decisions
- 89% agreed that the programme increased job satisfaction
- 74% agreed that the programme assists with employee retention
- 100% said they would recommend the programme to others

Written feedback from employees who have undertaken career development sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. “Thanks for all your help. I had an interview which went really well and the next day they offered me an even better position. I was overwhelmed.”

Asked whether the career development programme might lead to people leaving the DHB for other employers, Phil Cammish expresses confidence that the programme has reduced staff turnover. “Turnover has slowly reduced since the programme was introduced, from 20% in 2004 to 12% last year. Of course, this decline can’t be attributed solely to the career development initiative but we know that the initiative contributes to employees staying with the DHB.”

Attendees confirm this: “I feel the DHB has opened up new opportunities for me within the DHB environment.”

And another: “I now feel that I can go further in my position and work my way up.”

Career Development Adviser Sarah Strong tells of one participant who after 15 years in nursing wanted a change but did not know what to do. “Following the career development process, she realised she was good at and enjoyed detail, targets and timelines,” she says. “We discussed project management as an option and she was keen to explore this further.”

When a suitable vacancy arose within the DHB, the employee applied for and gained the position. The interview panel commented that out of all the applicants she was most able to clearly describe why the role suited her.

The programme has shown that work-life balance is a key factor in staff satisfaction with their work. The DHB plans to develop guidelines to further support work-life balance. It also plans to do more work around meeting the needs of Māori staff.

The programme has been so successful, it has evolved into a commercial package called Career Dimensionz and has been adopted by other DHBs, local government organisations and private sector organisations.

The commercial products can be reviewed at www.careerdimensionz.co.nz.

Phoenix Inc Supported Employment

Phoenix Inc Supported Employment, which won the Small to Medium Organisation Award, has worked with disabled people and Palmerston North employers under the leadership of Janice Gordon for 14 years.

The not-for-profit networks with employers to find paid positions for disabled people and then works with the employer and the employee for as long as needed, even until retirement. The work is intensely demanding for the seven staff members so Phoenix Inc endeavours to provide a supportive work environment which enables staff to keep meeting the challenge.

"The nature of our work means employees can be subject to a great deal of stress," says Janice. "External supervision and counselling is available wherever needed and is supported by a general sense of camaraderie in the Phoenix Inc offices. We have to make sure we have fun and celebrate success. Work-life balance is essential to keeping staff mentally and physically healthy."

Phoenix Inc's work-life initiatives include a range of flexible working options such as flexible working hours, part-time work and job sharing. Leave options mean staff have a great deal of flexibility in attending to family emergencies or taking time out to relax and re-energise themselves. For example, Phoenix Inc offers two extra days annual leave (Phoenix Days) on top of the statutory four weeks, flexible use of paid sick days, leave for the birth of a grandchild, extended leave if staff need to attend to family matters, special leave for sporting events, paid study leave and a week's long service leave.

Health and wellness options include eye tests, OOS testing, flu vaccinations and gym membership.

The benefits for Phoenix Inc include high staff morale and productivity. "Work-life balance strategies mean staff work better, are happier, more motivated, have heightened self esteem and are very loyal," says Janice.

The range of work-life initiatives available at Phoenix Inc is a reflection of Janice Gordon's leadership skills and modelling. For example, extra holidays



The Phoenix Inc team receive their certificate at the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards gala presentation dinner.

are given in recognition of productivity and staff are fully consulted on and take ownership of the direction of Phoenix Inc.

"I see a balanced and family-friendly workplace as a desirable environment for all of us," says Janice. "People who are treated well will reciprocate with high productivity and team cohesion."

One staff member, Fred Asalemo, talks about how Phoenix Inc helps him meet family and study commitments: "Every year I travel to Samoa for family and cultural occasions, which involve a lot of time off work. Janice's understanding of the role of cultural diversity in the work-life balance mix has allowed me to take extended leave for these events," he says. "I'm also studying towards a PhD and Janice has empowered and supported me with resources and allowed days off from work for study and training."

Phoenix Inc's support helps Employment Consultant Lia Hendriks in a different way. "Phoenix has given me a great opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, which is very satisfying," she says. "But I found that my job lacked the physical activity that I need for a good work-life balance. I discussed this with Janice and she allowed me to take time off twice a week to have a work-out at a fitness centre."

Mind and Body

Mind and Body operates in the area of mental health and is also committed to ensuring staff are well supported so they can be effective and creative at work.

Jim Burdett set up Mind and Body in 1998 to employ, train and supervise consumer advisers for mental health services provided by Auckland Healthcare. The company has grown rapidly in recent years and now employs 36 people, all of whom have experience of living with mental illness.

It provides education services to mental health service providers around the country, advises the Ministry of Health and Mental Health Commission, provides peer support services in Central Auckland, West Auckland and Christchurch and provides intensive support to people moving into independent living situations from supported accommodation.

Jim Burdett says the company's mission is to respect and promote the autonomy of people on their journey of recovery from mental illness. "We support them to live in the world with the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else."

The principles underlining Mind and Body's operations point to the unique nature of this workplace. They include, for example, "All staff have a healthy disrespect for the impossible" and "Organisational activities are respectful, person-centred and strengths-focused."

Support for work-life balance is a critical component of Mind and Body's business success. "Our shared experience of living with mental illness contributes to a unified and supportive culture which fosters individuals'

strength, maturity and passion for the work," says Jim. "Work-life balance is absolutely core to our success as it is vital that we support the health of our workforce.

"Initiatives like flexible working hours and comprehensive supervision structures enable us to both retain talented, intelligent people and to support them to reach their full potential at work. Staff recognise this and are extremely loyal and passionate about the future of the company."

All staff are set up to work from home and receive financial reimbursement for home office expenses. Jim Burdett says this is a significant factor in maintaining a supportive and robust team. "It means that if someone is feeling unwell or anxious about coming into the office, they can stay home and do their work in a comfortable environment."

Hours are completely flexible as staff are employed to work a certain number of hours each week depending on their capabilities and personal commitments and can make their own choices about when to do the work.

Staff also have the option of increasing or decreasing their hours as their circumstances change. For example, new staff who have been out of paid work due to illness often want to start working part-time and increase their hours as their confidence increases.

Recruitment decisions are strongly influenced by the applicants' personal values. As Jim Burdett says, "Skills and knowledge can be taught, whereas ingrained values are unlikely to change." A comprehensive training programme introduces each new recruit to the company, their role and the skills they need to excel.

As all Mind and Body staff have experienced mental illness and may do so again, special leave is a critical part of the employment conditions. As well as 10 days sick leave per year which can be taken as mental health days, the company may extend sick leave or hold someone's job open for as long as it takes for them to return to work.

"If people wish to continue working with us but with fewer or different responsibilities we do our best to find them alternative roles," says Jim. "We also welcome staff who come into the office while feeling mentally unwell to 'hang out' and be supported by their team members. This has happened to many of us at one time or another and it's a strong element of our supportive team environment."

Staff participate in a range of supervision settings – group supervision, line-management supervision and monthly external supervision. Extra supervision is provided to anyone who needs it. Staff can also access personal

counselling when issues in their personal life are affecting their work.

Given the diversity of people living with mental illness, Mind and Body strives to employ a diverse mix of staff who can work appropriately with clients and raise awareness among the whole team. "We genuinely value the differences among our staff," says Jim. "The organisational culture is one in which all staff are encouraged to use their individual knowledge and talents in their own way to further the work of the company."

This can be through facilitating cultural training for their colleagues, building relationships with other support agencies or developing information which is accessible to the whole community. For example, the company's peer support brochures have been translated into Māori, Mandarin and Hindi.

Staff act as a mentor for their own particular area of expertise. For example, Christine Poto mentors the peer support team on Māori culture so they can work more effectively with Māori clients and their families.

The company has been working with an NZQA consultancy to develop its peer support training programme into a one-year level four national certificate course. "This will give people who have worked for us as a Peer Support Worker a formal qualification to take into other roles in the health sector," says Jim Burdett.

News

Flexible working legislation changes playing field

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 was recently passed in Parliament and will come into force on 1 July next year.

The new legislation give employees who have caring responsibilities for someone else and have been working for the same employer for six months the right to ask for changes in their hours of work, days of work, or place of work. The employee will need to explain how the change will help them provide better care for the person concerned.

The Act requires employers to consider the request for flexible working arrangements and specifies the grounds upon which they can refuse a request. It also describes the process by which requests are made and responded to.

The new legislation will be reviewed after two years and the possibility of extending the provisions to all employees will be considered then.

Acting GM Human Resources at ANZ National Financial Group, Bernie O'Brien, says ANZ National already promotes work flexibility above and beyond the requirements of the Act. "We are aware that we are facing a world in which different generations of staff have competing and diverse 'life needs', not just around children or work-life balance,

but also around staff having primary care responsibilities for elderly relatives," O'Brien says.

"This legislation is a good first step. However, one of the biggest challenges we face in New Zealand is a change in mindset to embrace flexibility as a viable, standard way of working which makes business sense. We need to move the culture of our workplaces forward and reap the benefits of flexibility in terms of performance, growth, inclusion and productivity."

In 2008, ANZ National is building on its flexibility initiatives with a programme called "My Flexibility" which will "provide a framework to enable employees and their managers to engage in well researched, quality conversations to

ascertain which leave and flexibility policies can be put in place to best meet individual and business needs.”

It will include a simple process, requiring minimum paperwork, which focuses on regular catch-ups to chat about the success of arrangements and make changes where necessary.

More information on the legislation is available at www.dol.govt.nz/worklife.

Latest research

Costs of caring in Australia

The Australian Taskforce on Care Costs has released new research on the challenges of combining work and caring responsibilities for elderly and disabled people.

Drawing on new quantitative and qualitative data *The hidden face of care* assesses how well Australia is currently meeting dual work/care pressures and whether it is well positioned for the future in terms of public infrastructure and workplace flexibility.

The report finds that current public and workplace policies do not provide enough support to enable carers to easily balance work and their caring responsibilities and that this is having a direct negative impact on their work choices. As an example, the report says 44% of carers are working below their skill level in order to access the flexibility they need to balance work and caring responsibilities.

The report says there is a need for urgent attention from policy makers and employers to relieve work/care tensions. “The need for reform will become increasingly acute as the Australian workforce faces the dual pressures of an increasing skill shortage and a decreasing caretaker ratio,” says the report.

www.tocc.org.au/media/Final_TOCC_2007_Report_The_Hidden_Face_of_Care_16_Nov_2007.pdf

Work-life options amongst UK SMEs

In an effort to demonstrate that SMEs in the UK offer work-life options in response

to business drivers, not just legislative requirements, the British Chambers of Commerce undertook research into working arrangements amongst SMEs earlier this year.

The survey’s conclusions include:

- Employers are doing far and above what is required to be legally compliant both in terms of flexible work patterns and leave arrangements.
- The majority of respondents offer flexible working or alternative leave arrangements to all employees.
- Only 16% of respondents cited a desire to be legally compliant as a reason for managing their employees flexibly. The majority of respondents were either motivated by a personal conviction or by an employee’s request.
- Businesses are working flexibly, government must now work with employers to identify those external barriers – such as the lack of affordable childcare – which are inhibiting further progress on this agenda.

In his foreword to the research report, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce David Frost said: “This report offers a vivid picture of the nature and degree of flexibility being practiced by SMEs and why they’re doing it. Businesses aren’t just looking to ensure legal compliance, they believe in the benefits that flexibility can bring and are recognising that there is a commercial advantage to be gained in terms of recruitment and retention of staff.”

Download a pdf of the report www.chamberonline.co.uk/policy/pdf/work_and_life_report.pdf

Beyond working boundaries in the UK

A research report by UK-based Orange Business Services identifies the main challenges for UK employers and employees in dealing with flexible working practices. As the UK legislation is similar to New Zealand’s new legislation, this report could provide useful insights for employers here.

The report says that effective management of flexible working will help organisations be more competitive and

successful, and retain the best talent.

The project involved a survey of 1440 employees, focus groups and interviews with employees, and workshops with managers. It highlighted 10 considerations for employers offering flexible working options:

1. Can you ensure flexible working underpins the strategic aims of the organisation?
2. What will the costs and benefits of flexible working be?
3. What issues is flexible working meant to address?
4. What working arrangements currently exist across the workforce?
5. Who will be able to work flexibly and who will not?
6. What will the impact of flexible working be across the workforce?
7. How formal should the flexible working culture be?
8. Are flexible workers adequately supported?
9. Are suitable IT arrangements in place?
10. How will employees be managed, evaluated and rewarded?

Director of Communications and Operations at Orange Business Services Robert Ainger says the research shows that the UK business community has made positive moves towards the adoption of flexible working practices. “However, there are gaps between perception and reality and there are major challenges for both employers and employees in dealing with flexible working,” he says.

“A key challenge is how notions of effectiveness are being redefined. Being the first or the last in the office can no longer be a measure of an employee’s commitment and productivity and managing a flexible workforce will mean worrying less about how employees work and more about what they produce.”

To find out more click on [Beyond Boundaries](#) or go to www.business.orange.uk and search for *Beyond Boundaries*.