



EEO TRUST
NEWSLETTER
December 2005 No. 34



Helping dedicated parents be dedicated workers

More flexible working hours would help dedicated parents be dedicated workers according to the 4,475 parents who completed a recent EEO Trust survey.

The on-line survey asked parents what would most help them meet their responsibilities at work and at home. Flexible starting and finishing times and occasional time off during the day would both be an enormous help.

For example, one mother wrote, "Flexibility is essential to maintain a balance of work, home and personal life. When working full-time and being almost a full-time mum it's easy to lose the balance. Workplaces need to have systems in place to enable staff also to be mums."

But the survey was not just completed by mothers; more than 1,000 fathers took the time to answer the on-line questions and they also wanted more flexibility.

They were less likely, however, to say that affordable, convenient, quality childcare

"Other than the mortgage, there are three reasons I work - to finish my sentences, to drink hot coffee, and to go to the toilet on my own!"

was important and were also less likely to rate part-time work options highly.

One respondent explained why quality part-time work was important to working parents and to employers. "I know of so

many talented women who are being denied the chance to go back to work part-time because their employer is forcing them to either come back full-time or quit. We don't have children just to put them in daycare, and employers

should recognise what they are losing by not letting mothers re-enter the workforce part-time."

Parents' reasons for working are varied, with financial reasons top of the list. Parents also want to work to be a good

example to their children and so they are not reliant on the Government. One graphically explained her reasons for working: "Other than the mortgage, there are three reasons I work - to

finish my sentences, to drink hot coffee, and to go to the toilet on my own!"

Another described the mix of motives that parents bring to work, "Ability to build a comfortable life for myself and my family. To show to my child that it should never be an option to be a beneficiary."

Only 247 of the survey respondents were not in paid work and 76% of these would like to be. When asked what would help them do paid work, they rated good childcare, part-time work options and the ability to bring work home occasionally more highly than the other respondents.

Breastfeeding facilities emerged as a controversial issue in the survey, with some respondents saying mothers should not return to work while they are breastfeeding and others reporting their positive experiences of continuing to breastfeed while working. For example, one mother wrote, "My team leader was very understanding. He paid for

my car park across the road so I could breastfeed at home at lunchtime."

Another mother described her embarrassment when she returned to work, "I found it very difficult to carry on breastfeeding after returning to work because there were no breastfeeding facilities. I was embarrassed to approach anyone to find out about facilities. Information should be given to all staff on maternity leave on how and where they can access the breastfeeding facilities without them having to ask for it."

More than a quarter of the male respondents said it was important to have breastfeeding facilities in the workplace. As one wrote, "I obviously do not have a direct need for breastfeeding facilities, however, I am continually stunned (and was before I became a dad) that breastfeeding is still considered offensive. Well, so long as it is considered offensive, facilities must be made available."

The survey uncovered valuable information for employers wanting to ensure they help workers with children reach their potential at work. Employers could consider:

- Offering flexible starting and finishing times
- Enabling people to work from home occasionally
- Letting people work overtime and take time off in lieu
- Being understanding if people need to leave work suddenly to attend to family emergencies
- Offering quality part-time work to retain valuable staff
- Finding a room or space at work that sick children can use
- Creating job share positions
- Ensuring there is a private space for mothers to express milk and a fridge where they feel comfortable storing breastmilk.

Full-time fathering a bonus

Craig Laurent is one father who has benefited from his employer's family-friendly initiatives. He is IT Technical Manager for Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSDNZ) which recently introduced a parental leave policy where the company pays the primary caregiver of a new baby to take leave for up to 14 weeks.

Craig's baby daughter Aimee was born in August last year. "My wife took around eight months off to look after Aimee," he explains. "When she went back to work in February this year I took over and did a three-month stint with Aimee, receiving part of my salary from MSDNZ during that period."

Craig says that initially he wanted to spend the time with his baby daughter so he could share the responsibility for her care but the benefits were much greater. "I understand more of what my wife went through during her stint so we're on the same level about things that we went through emotionally looking after Aimee on our own during the day."

He says that when his wife was looking after Aimee during the weekdays she was not able to give him his turn at parenting during the weekends and he found himself doing the same thing when he was the full-time parent.

"It was also really important to be involved in the emotional issues around having a baby; the highs and the lows of dealing with a child 24 hours a day. I feel I have a better relationship with my daughter."

As a result of spending the three months with Aimee, Craig now shares the parenting equally with his wife. He drops Aimee off at daycare in the morning and has the flexibility to leave work early or take time off to care for her if she's ill.



Craig says MSDNZ is extremely supportive. "There are no issues about giving me the flexibility I need now that I've got a child. It doesn't go all one way either. While I was away on parental leave I think the organisation got a bit out of being able to give one of my team members more responsibility and now he's more able to step into my shoes when necessary so that will help with succession planning. And I definitely feel more loyal to MSDNZ."

Reaping the rewards of fair employment

Organisations that emphasise fair employment practices tend to have lower staff turnover than other workplaces according to a recent EEO Trust survey.

Detailed analysis of the results of the 2005 EEO Trust Diversity Survey revealed that organisations which have strategies to ensure fair employment practices are more likely to have a diverse workforce and lower staff turnover than organisations with low levels of formal commitment to equitable employment.

The EEO Trust Diversity Survey was completed by 487 organisations that reported on a range of employment practices including whether they

have an EEO or diversity strategy, whether they train managers to use fair recruitment procedures, and how they prevent harassment and bullying. They also reported on key outcomes including the diversity of their workforce and their senior management team, and whether diversity measures had impacted positively on their business.

The most frequently mentioned impacts of EEO/diversity initiatives were attracting, recruiting and retaining quality staff. Respondents also mentioned increased staff satisfaction and improved service. For example, one wrote, "Low staff turnover plus high staff contentment

levels have led to good productivity and a solid financial performance."

Of the respondents, the 52 small organisations employing fewer than 10 staff were less likely to have formal EEO/diversity strategies than the larger organisations but they are just as likely to actively endorse EEO/diversity.

However, small organisations were less likely to have formal bullying and harassment prevention measures in place, perhaps giving an insight into why a recent Human Rights Commission study found that small organisations are more likely to be the subject of sexual harassment complaints.

Employers win with work and life

Winners of this year's EEO Trust Work & Life Awards showed that organisations which support people at work and in their personal lives reap the rewards in employee commitment and productivity.

Vector, winner of the large organisation category, developed the VectorLife programme to enable employees to balance work and life priorities in flexible ways that meet their needs and the needs of the business. It includes flexible work options, a range of initiatives to encourage health and wellbeing and comprehensive training and development programmes.

Vector CEO Mark Franklin says a network is only as good as the intelligence behind it. "The success of our networks is shaped by innovative, intelligent thinkers who can stretch the boundaries and enable us to grow and progress."

He says that VectorLife recognises that intelligent people do their best

work when they are treated with respect and have the freedom to take care of the other important issues in their lives alongside their work.

Flexibility is key to VectorLife; in the options available and in the understanding that work-life issues are different for everyone, with managers

"You can see it when staff are not fulfilled; they're frustrated, unhappy, stressed and that impacts on performance, on judgement, on commitment, on the dynamics of the whole organisation."

Mark Franklin, CEO, Vector

expected to think flexibly and find ways to say yes to staff suggestions.

Mark Franklin says, "I know that getting the balance wrong costs a business. You can see it when staff are not fulfilled;

they're frustrated, unhappy, stressed and that impacts on performance, on judgement, on commitment, on the dynamics of the whole organisation."

Nine months after VectorLife was introduced, staff turnover had dropped to an historic low of five per cent.

Winner of the small organisation category, Strategy Recruitment, also reported low staff turnover. Strategy employs 28 staff and has only lost one employee to another recruitment agency in the past three years.

Productivity is also high, reflecting high staff morale and a positive attitude to work.

Strategy was set up in 1999 by directors Barry Brown and Hamish Low. Hamish describes their approach to business, "Having worked in a hands-on recruitment capacity ourselves before establishing Strategy, Barry and I know how difficult it is to maintain a balance, and over the years we have learned that the way to get the best from

a team is to have the team at its best. This means making sure to the best of our ability that they are balanced, refreshed, well-rounded people. This cannot happen if they spend their entire lives working."

Strategy's work-life initiatives include flexible working arrangements, an emphasis on fun at work, study assistance and a commitment to never holding work meetings outside regular working hours.

One of Strategy's employees to benefit from this approach is Senior Recruitment Consultant Sonja Toheriri who balances her parenting responsibilities by working from home every Wednesday.

Sonja joined Strategy nearly two years ago, choosing the firm over other potential employers because of its emphasis on integrity and honesty, and its commitment to supporting family life.

The directors immediately agreed that she could always start work at 9am and finish at 5pm in order to drop off and pick up her two children from school. She says she also takes time off occasionally to attend school events. "I've never been made to feel guilty for taking time off or leaving at five on the dot every day," she says.

Despite this arrangement, Sonja says that earlier this year at one of her regular reviews she admitted to her manager that she was getting stressed. "They asked what would help my work-life balance and I suggested working remotely one day a week. I'd already been set up to work from home occasionally and they immediately said 'yes' to a more regular arrangement."

Sonja works a standard day at home on Wednesdays and achieves as much as she does on Monday and Tuesday combined, despite doing household jobs between work tasks.

As if Sonja is not busy enough already, she is also pursuing study goals and spends a couple of work hours each week on study. "The directors are here to support our goals and achievements," she says. "They're very loyal to their employees and they get that back with a very strong, bonded team. We all get on like one big happy family. This is the first job I've ever had where I actually wake up and enjoy going to work."

Winner of the First Steps Award was engineering consultancy Harrison Grierson which employs around 300 staff in offices throughout New Zealand and in Brisbane.

"The directors are here to support our goals and achievements. They're very loyal to their employees and they get that back with a very strong, bonded team."
Sonja Toheriri, Senior Recruitment Consultant, Strategy Recruitment.

It says the benefits of its work-life initiatives include:

- Improved recruitment and retention of women with a 68% increase in female employees from 2000 to 2005. During that period, 13 women took parental leave, and ten have since returned to work at the firm.
- Improved graduate retention with graduates now staying with the firm on average six months longer than they did in 2000, representing a saving of approximately \$1,000 per annum per graduate.
- Improved staff morale and team interaction through subsidised sports and social clubs, greater approachability of senior managers and a culture of always celebrating success.

Winner of the Manāki Tangata innovation category was Mount Albert Pak 'n Save which actively supports its diverse workforce through a range of initiatives including a Muslim prayer room and encouraging staff to speak in their mother tongue at work.

The supermarket benefits through excellent staff retention which owner Brian Carran estimates saves the business \$100,000 per annum.

Inspector Russell Gibson won the Walk the Talk Award for his work as Human Resources Manager at NZ Police Central District Headquarters in Palmerston North.

Inspector Gibson has been a strong advocate for flexibility to enable people with children, particularly women, to remain in the police force. This approach extends to the working hours and locations of people who need to care for ill family members or are undertaking additional training or study.

The benefits of Inspector Gibson's approach can be seen in Central District's retention figures. It currently has an attrition rate of 2.3% compared to a national rate of 4.5%. Sick leave has been reduced by 7% in the last two years and the number of women in management positions in Central District has increased by 85% during the past three years.

IBM supports the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards





Disabled people – making the most of their abilities

A guide for employers wanting to tap into the skills and energy of disabled people is now available from the EEO Trust website.

The guide is packed with ideas on making the most of what disabled people can bring to the workplace. It answers common questions and concerns, provides guidance on how employers can ensure they accurately assess the skills of disabled people in recruitment, and gives practical tips on working with disabled people.

The guide also dispels common myths, for example, that disabled people are likely to be absent more than other staff and are more likely to be involved in workplace accidents. In fact, research has found that disabled people have better than average attendance and safety records.

A number of case studies demonstrate how disabled people have added value for many New Zealand organisations. One example is Barclay Engineering in Lower Hutt which has had positive experience of employing two blind men.

One worked for the company for almost 12 years, the second for five years.

The men worked on a capstan lathe set up for repeat work to manufacture plumbing fittings such as brass nipples and sockets. A highly developed sense of touch enabled them to check that the thread and sizing on the products were correct.

“In many ways, blind people can be more aware than other people,” says founder and Managing Director Arthur Barclay. “We found that these men could tell when tools were getting blunt and needed sharpening better than people with full vision because they had a more refined sense of touch.”

“The other staff were as good as gold with the blind men,” says Mr Barclay. “We viewed our blind staff as equals with the rest of the staff.”

The Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind advises employers on how to ensure workplaces are functional and safe, and offers staff training on blindness awareness. It also aims to broaden employers’ awareness of the benefits of employing a blind, deafblind or vision-impaired person. Employer awareness trainers are available to provide information and advice. (www.rnzfb.org.nz)

Police launch religious diversity book

A new resource for the police force will develop awareness of the different religious groups in New Zealand. Called *A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity*, the book covers seven major religious faiths including Maori spirituality, Buddhism and Christianity.

While specifically addressing issues that may affect police officers such as whether to remove shoes before entering someone’s house and rituals associated with death, the book may be helpful for New Zealand workplaces which employ a diverse mix of people. It describes key religious beliefs, celebrations and protocols, for example, prohibitions around food and working hours.

It can be downloaded from the resources section at www.police.govt.nz.