



unlimited

The 20 Best Places to Work

Survey and analysis by:



John Robertson & Associates

Sponsored by:



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Training Business Since 1970



haines
Communicate the many people

They run personal development programmes, take their workers out of their comfort zones, reward success, and chart a clear sense of direction — and their employees love them for it. **Sheetal Nasta** takes a tour of the nation's Best Places to Work

Momentum's
Bede Ashby:
leading the
winning
workplace



WHEN WAIKATO District Council road designer Kurt Abbot told his employer about his dream of going to Mount Everest, his employer sent him packing — with a \$5000 grant. After almost four weeks in the Himalayas, teaching local primary school kids about New Zealand and absorbing Buddhist wisdom from the monks, Abbot returned feeling enriched and with a renewed sense of commitment to the employer who made it happen for him.

His employer, meanwhile, saw its contribution as part and parcel of being an excellent place to work. WDC managing director Warwick Bennett reckons it's all about giving employees opportunities to grow, not just professionally but personally. "We strive to make employees better people when they leave the organisation than when they arrived. We try and establish their aspirations and where they want to go in life, and make people saleable products."

That's also what impresses Doug Paulin most about Lion Breweries (a top 5 large workplace; see sidebar page 59), where he's a marketing director for the mainstream brands. He says he's a better person after attending three lifestyle inventory courses at Lion over the past seven years, the last one about a year ago. The course is meant to teach leaders to improve the way they interact within their teams by practising "humanistic encouraging". Seven years ago, Paulin scored close to zero. "I was very much about getting things done and not too much about the people I was dealing with," he says. Now, the way he communicates is central to his success in and outside of work, and his most recent score put him in the 90th percentile. "Even people who I deal with in my personal life would say I've changed in seven years."

In today's workplace, growth and development for employees is no longer just about achieving a higher position, a new title or having more people to manage. Employees still want advancement and growth from a workplace, but a common theme among the top scoring employers in this year's Best Places to Work survey is that they give staff the opportunity to develop in a deeper, broader sense, says John Robertson of John Robertson & Associates, the workplace survey specialists who administered the survey and analysed the results. This year's top employers rated 13% higher in learning and development than all others who participated.

When AMI Insurance (a top 4 large workplace) first started offering the "Investment in Excellence" personal development programme, employees went in expecting technical training on insurance matters. Instead, it was all about developing a personal vision, and building the skills to remove roadblocks, achieve personal goals and manage change effectively. Now, employees don't wait for development opportunities — they create their own, says AMI chief executive John Balmforth. "It has given them the ability to get



a vision in their own life, with career, family and their personal life. The big advantage to the company is having a group of people who think similarly and have a common belief in the [company's] vision ... If employees don't have their own vision, it's difficult to get them to agree with ours."

And the payoff for this employer largesse? Better recruitment and retention. The opportunity for advancement is one of the key drivers for employees choosing to stay with their current employer. Top 20 employers were rated 81% on the statement, "I am unlikely to leave this organisation within the next 12 months", compared with 69% for all other organisations. And in a tight market with low unemployment — just 4.4% in the quarter ending in September — Top 20 employers in this year's survey are recruiting and retaining employees by redefining what advancement means. They are keeping talent within the company by broadening roles and responsibilities, developing soft skills like leadership and sometimes just pushing employees out of their comfort zones.

That's how recruiting company OCG Consulting has kept Jen Marden, a PA there for more than seven years. She says she hasn't looked in the newspaper for a job in six years. Her title hasn't changed much in all that time, but her skills have: she's gone from following the system to setting up systems in various departments and training other PAs. When she feels she's no longer offering anything and can't learn any more she'll be ready to leave, but she can't foresee that just yet. "I see all these challenges ahead," she says of her newest role as database administrator.

Ditto Julie Beaufill. After five years at Environment Waikato (a top 5 best medium workplace), she doesn't supervise any others. But when the company offered her a

How the winners were selected

The 2003 Best Places to Work Survey saw another big increase in the number of companies participating. Winning companies were selected from 128 entrants based on survey responses from 13,708 employees — up from 117 organisations and 10,700 employees in 2002. Organisations had to meet the minimum qualifying criteria of a 50% response rate and at least 30 individual employee responses to be eligible for Best Places awards.

The survey, designed and analysed by workplace survey specialists John Robertson & Associates, included 51 multiple-selection and two open-ended questions that measured employees' perceptions in seven areas: the organisation, communication and co-operation, the team, the job, learning and development, recognition and reward, and overall perception. Based on these, John Robertson & Associates calculated a weighted performance index, which was the score used to rank the 20 best workplaces overall, as well as the top achievers in the small (under 100 staff), medium (100-399 staff) and large company (over 400) categories.

The survey was sponsored by Haines Recruitment Advertising and business training company David Forman.

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The top 20 workplaces

RANKING	COMPANY (LAST YEAR'S RANK)	PERFORMANCE INDEX	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	RESPONSE RATE	STAFF TURNOVER	ANNUAL REVENUE
1	Momentum Consulting Group HR recruiter and consultant	86.5	48	77.1%	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
2	OCG Consulting HR recruiter and consultant	85.8	54	92.6%	16.6%	\$20m
3	Henry Schein Regional/Regional Health (1) Dental products/services	85.5	53	69.8%	18.0%	\$12m
4	Information Tools (5) Marketing software and database service	85.3	62	67.7%	8.0%	\$9.5m
5	Colmar Brunton Research Brand development	85.2	50	96.0%	15.9%	\$6m
6	Intergen (6) <i>Microsoft solutions development company</i>	84.7	48	97.9%	10.0%	\$6m
7	Microsoft New Zealand (4) <i>IT services</i>	83.1	125	59.2%	8.0%	Not disclosed
8	Express Data (3) <i>Technology supplier</i>	81.9	42	78.6%	16.8%	\$61m
9	Flight Centre (NZ) (8) <i>Retail travel services</i>	81	650	74.0%	32.9%	\$700m
10=	Merck Sharp & Dohme New Zealand <i>Medical research</i>	80.9	100	82.0%	19.0%	\$49m
10=	Waikato District Council (7) <i>District council</i>	80.9	167	55.1%	11.0%	\$43.5m
12	BMW Group New Zealand <i>Luxury car maker</i>	80.7	65	89.2%	12.0%	\$150m
13	Christchurch City Libraries <i>Public library</i>	79.1	367	64.3%	19.2%	Operating costs of \$22.4m
14	Nokia New Zealand <i>Mobile communications</i>	78.6	39	94.9%	22.0%	\$94m
15	Hosting and Datacentre Services <i>IT services</i>	78.5	45	93.3%	4.0%	\$20m
16	Ministry for Culture and Heritage (20) <i>Government adviser on culture and heritage</i>	78.2	70	71.4%	11.7%	Funding of \$8.2m
17	SellAgency (12=) <i>Brand manager</i>	77.9	99	65.6%	24.0%	Not disclosed
18	Outward Bound Trust of New Zealand <i>Adventure learning school</i>	77.8	55	78.2%	Not disclosed	\$3.9m
19	BT Funds Management (2) <i>Investment and financial services</i>	77.3	49	81.6%	4.0%	Not disclosed
20	Fidelity Life Assurance Limited <i>Insurance and financial services</i>	77.2	68	83.8%	5.0%	\$43m

COMMENTS

Directors at this HR consultancy lead by example, working alongside employees in an open-plan office based on an egalitarian philosophy that encourages individual workstyles. Lack of hierarchy and frequent fun team-building outings, from weekly lunches to an afternoon movie, run and bowling, keep things lighthearted and familial.

Recruiting for a cultural fit and an extensive 10-day induction programme spread over several months, are two ways this recruitment firm maintains its culture. A transparent remuneration system and financial updates foster co-operation, while flexi-time, a social club and the wine-and-beer fridge help ease the long hours.

To MD Garth Bradford, building a great workplace isn't rocket science. "Don't lie to your team — if things are bad, tell them. When times are good, celebrate your success." Common courtesies and everyday acts of respect such as 'please' and 'thank you' are part of the organisation's culture.

'Co-ordinators' rather than 'managers', and 'members' rather than 'staff' is how Information Tools defines its people. Open communication, a non-hierarchical bonus structure, and a strong sense of purpose — to create prosperity — all help to encourage employees to take ownership. No organisation did better than Information Tools on the question "I am unlikely to leave this organisation in the next 12 months."

For MD James Armstrong, getting the best out of employees involves creating an organisation with a strong "family feel," a caring and supportive culture, and hiring "a collection of like-minded people here who tend to spark off one another." Staff at all levels are included in regularly reviewing company strategies and priorities, and in celebrating success.

In the top 20 list now for the third year, Interger director and part-owner (the other 50% of the company is owned by staff) Tony Stewart has seen the difference a good work culture can make. Interger continues to work hard at maintaining an open and co-operative culture, particularly as the company grows and matures.

Organisational values provide a "cultural anchor," says managing director Ross Peat. Employees are required to assess their own behaviour against those values. And fun is part of the budget. The Make It Fun Fund is available for anyone who wants to organise a social activity.

General managers Gavan Brunton and Paul Plester are keen on giving employees the autonomy to solve their own problems, since the personal satisfaction of overcoming challenges is a reward in itself. Employees get their spotlight during quarterly award ceremonies broadcast via video conference.

Celebrating success, highlighting achievements monthly and supporting employees' personal goals with financial management and wellness programmes have kept Flight Centre flying high among employees in a difficult year for international travel. While enjoying small team dynamics in the retail stores, employees can reap the benefits of the resources of a large, progressive organisation.

"Working to improve the quality of peoples' lives" translates into a very clear sense of purpose for employees in this pharmaceutical company. Open and honest discussion of issues and great emphasis on learning and development make for an encouraging environment — the objective being "to keep you forever employable." A strong performance-oriented culture is balanced against the need to retain a healthy work/life balance.

Employees stay actively engaged and appreciated with annual personal development grants, bus tours and motivational speakers, frequent celebrations and socialising with morning and afternoon tea.

All staff are given the opportunity to lease their own "ultimate driving machine," but luxury doesn't stop with the car. Employees' needs are well taken care of at this organisation. An on-premise cafe where employees gather for lunch is a place where information and communication flows naturally over delicious hot meals.

Libraries are places of learning, and in Christchurch City Libraries, this includes library staff. Libraries manager Sue Sutherland expects her staff to take responsibility for their own upskilling and supports individual learning initiatives through the "keeping fit for the job" programme. Their own award-winning leadership development programme combines theoretical learning with practical solutions.

At Nokia NZ, "values aren't a nice to have, they're a got to have," says HR manager Melanie Nankivell, and together they provide a framework of behaviour and interaction referred to as the Nokia Way. Employees get annual well-being allowances, which they are required to spend on some form of leisure or health activity.

When Wayne Norrie and Roger Cockayne took over HDS last year, they had rocks in their heads. Organisational culture at HDS is symbolised by Cockayne's story about a rock in Sydney harbour, from which his lifeguard friends patrolled the beach, and had a rule where all rock occupants always had to tell the truth. At HDS, "the rock" symbolises truth and honesty, and all staff are encouraged to use the rock as a notification to others that they are speaking from the heart.

"People and good relationships are the key to our success," says CEO Martin Matthews. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage aims to maintain a professional, collegial atmosphere, where employees are given the freedom to pursue their own interests.

Keeping things simple is a priority at SellAgence, says executive chairman Kerry Gleeson — from policies and procedures to individual goals. To keep organisational values fresh and current, "Project Glue" aims to identify, articulate and encourage key cultural elements. Pride in the brands that SellAgence represents is also key to job satisfaction.

A not-for-profit organisation, Outward Bound has turned the traditional organisational structure on its head, with the people who deliver the courses at the top and everyone else supporting them. Before each course, instructors meet for "day zero," where the focus is on communication.

Despite the disruption of a takeover last year, the strong values-based culture of BT Funds Management has survived, contributing to their third top 20 placing in a row. CEO Craig Stobo emphasises open communication — listening and then acting on any concerns.

A new management team that's bent on creating energy and enthusiasm have not only upgraded branding and image, but have put all staff through a customer care programme. The 'Making Fidelity First' committee, made up of representatives from throughout the company, is dedicated to making Fidelity better for both internal and external customers.

Category Champs

The top 4* large workplaces (400+ staff)

RANKING	COMPANY (LAST YEARS RANK)
1	Flight Centre (1)
2	Lion Breweries (3)
3	Fisher & Paykel Healthcare (4)
4	AMI Insurance (2)

*The fifth organisation's performance index fell below the average index.

The top 5 medium workplaces (100-399 staff)

RANKING	COMPANY (LAST YEARS RANK)
1	Microsoft New Zealand (1)
2	Merck Sharp & Dohme New Zealand
3	Waikato District Council (2)
4	Christchurch City Libraries
5	Environment Waikato

The top 5 small workplaces (Less than 100 staff)

RANKING	COMPANY (LAST YEARS RANK)
1	Momentum Consulting Group
2	OCG Consulting
3	Henry Schein Regional/Regional Health (1)
4	Information Tools (4)
5	Colmar Brunton Research

project manager role two years ago, she considered it a great development opportunity. "There was a recognition that I could offer something," Beaufill says. "It was an awesome opportunity to make that step."

Having a sense of future at an organisation also matters. Indeed, it has the greatest influence on employees' satisfaction and, ultimately, their intention to stay at a workplace, according to the survey. It has eight times more influence than fair pay and benefits in influencing employees' overall perception of a workplace.

A sense of common purpose is important, too. "Successful organisations are good at breaking down silos," says John Robertson. "No matter where you are, you see the big picture and how you fit into it." Of course, the larger the company, the harder it is to maintain a clear line of sight between each person's job and the company's purpose for existing, where it is and where it's going. But the best large companies don't let their employees lose sight, and it all starts at the top. Like at the best small companies, top management at the best large companies articulates a clear vision and purpose and keeps everyone in the loop with frequent, open communication.

Flight Centre (9th overall and top large workplace) managing director Graeme Moore calls each of the chain's 140 shops personally every month to congratulate or commiserate with the shop leader about the month's results. At Lion, managing director Julian Davidson prepares monthly video clips to keep employees posted, in addition to going on roadshows to each brewery site every six months to share company results and outline company direction.

However, what really makes the best employers stand apart is that they take any excuse to celebrate success on a

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Winning laughs

Alan Casey has no trouble admitting he's been Ass of the Week. He came up with the idea for the award six months after he joined human resource consultancy Momentum as senior consultant. Now, every Tuesday, employees get together to discuss the company's progress, pat themselves on the back — and laugh at each other. Co-workers nominate each other and imitate the *faux pas* for the group.

At OCG, another recruiting consultancy, they similarly celebrate bloopers with the Wooden Spoon Award. Bobbi Ryan, a consultant at OCG, won the award for spending five minutes compassionately rejecting a candidate before realising she was talking to the wrong person.

It may remind you of a bad day at the playground, but for Momentum and OCG employees, who respectively voted their companies number 1 and 2 best places to work, not taking themselves too seriously is part of the formula for success.

"It's not malicious. It's about laughing at yourself. What you do is ham it up so the actual act isn't so



OCG: You gotta laugh

much the funny thing but the way a person delivers it," explains Bede Ashby, managing director and founding member of Momentum.

With only 48 employees at Momentum, 54 at OCG and an open-plan arrangement at both offices, it's just as easy to overhear gaffes as it is to hear successes. So why not break the ice? "The advantage of a small organisation is everybody knows everybody, you know everyone's strengths, everyone's weaknesses, so you can work with that, not around it," says Carolyn MacDonnell, senior consultant at Momentum. "They will find your Achilles heel here, and they will play on it."

No one is exempt — not even the directors, who sit side-by-side with their staff. And, it's not reserved just for those Tuesday lunches. "If you go to our work areas, you'll find that there's often a lot of bantering going on, or someone did something silly and everyone will be in hysterics," MacDonnell says.

"It gives people a sense of fun and clients feel that. [It puts a] lightness in their manner. You can feel the passion return for the afternoon," Ashby says. "You'll hear someone giggle at 3 pm, and you know why. They're still laughing about ass of the week."

MacDonnell agrees. "People comment, particularly clients that we meet or candidates, that it seems like a really fun place. Someone commented to me recently after a function that they like coming along. They feel energised." It's no coincidence, says Ashby. "When you're desperate people feel it. But people gravitate toward you if you're comfortable, safe, secure, confident, and you're sending out that signal."

Still, it's not for everyone. "It can be quite daunting if they're a bit timid or take everything too seriously," MacDonnell says. But so can the HR consulting and recruiting business, known for its competitive, commission-based sales environment. "There are no shrinking violets here," Casey says. Much of the secret, then, is in hiring for a cultural fit. Consultants regularly deal with demanding clients, stressed job candidates and long hours. They often have little control on the outcome or their workload, going through intense periods of work and then lulls.

It's a strategy that could very well backfire and drive employees away, but somehow it has the opposite effect. Ryan: "In those times when it's really busy and quite stressful, you need to be able to laugh."

Staff satisfaction = Financial returns

How important is staff satisfaction? Well if you compare the performance of the Top 20 Best Places to Work with all the rest, the happy workers have come up with the financial goods for their companies. Analysis over the first three years of the Best Places survey shows organisations with higher satisfaction scores also report higher levels of profit and revenue performance. Cause? Effect? Virtuous circle?

	Top 20	All others
Percentage of companies that reported an increase in staff numbers in last year	70%	40%
Average revenue growth '00-'02	20% pa	14% pa
Percentage of companies that reported an increase in revenue & profit	75%	58%

What's your hot button?

By examining three years of Best Places data, John Robertson & Associates, isolated the hot issues for workers, by age and gender.

Male & female > 20 years

Female < 20 years

Male > 20 years

Female 20-59 years

Male & Female 40+ years

Female >60 years

Job challenge

Contribution is valued

Cooperation between teams

Open & honest communication

Opportunity for advancement

A future in the organisation

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regular basis, pointing out every silver lining, thick or thin. According to the survey, Top 20 employers fared 22% better — the highest margin of difference between the best and the rest — when rated by employees on the statement, “We celebrate success in this organisation.”

At Flight Centre, area leaders rally employees from the shops in their area at the beginning of each month for “buzz nights” where outstanding performance is recognised — whether it’s for the new consultant who’s done the best in the first three months, most improved consultant or the top shop. Area leaders create award categories tailored to their teams and that month’s results. No two buzz nights need be alike, and it’s done all over again at a company-wide awards night at the end of the year.

Of course, you can’t celebrate success without acknowledging all those who contribute to that success, and that’s why this year’s best employers also scored 15% better on average in the area of recognition and reward. Support staff are not forgotten at Momentum Consulting Group (this year’s top ranked company), where the consultants and directors took over the phones recently while support staff were zipped off to a shopping mall for some retail therapy — on the company.

Rewards, value, memorable experiences are buzz words when it comes to customer service, but Robertson says employers need to apply the same principles to their employees, and the best ones do. “Customer focus is okay, but unless you’re employee-focused, you’ll never get there.”

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The “at risk” employee

Who’s the equivalent of a delinquent on your staff? Looking at the first three years of Best Places to Work data reveals there’s a group comprising 11% of the total sample whose overall perception scores (an aggregate measure of job satisfaction, commitment, and attitudes to the organisation as a place to work) were less than 50%. In other words they are unhappy in almost every category. So who are they? The “at risk” employee is:

- has between five and nine years of service
- does not manage staff
- is aged 30 – 39 years
- and is male





What matters most

Since the *Unlimited* Best Places to Work survey began four years ago we've dug deep to uncover what makes the biggest difference to how employees regard the organisations they work for. While every item in the survey may seem important, some are much more important than others when it comes to feelings of commitment, job satisfaction, attitudes to the organisation as a place to work, and intention to stay. We call these "key drivers".

While we've seen some change in the relative importance of each key driver over the past four years, the items themselves have been very consistent.

Analysis of the 2003 database shows the following five questions account for 73% of the total "importance weighting" (thus, all of the other questions account for a total importance weighting of 27%):

- I feel there is a future for me at this organisation
- I feel a sense of belonging to this organisation
- This organisation is a fun place to work
- The work I do makes full use of my knowledge and skills
- The pay and benefits I receive are fair for the work I do

Of these, the first item by far has the strongest influence on overall perceptions — more than twice the influence of the second item. It was also the most important in 2002, and even more so in 2003 — its importance rating rose 10 points in 2003, a reflection perhaps of uncertain times.

How would your organisation score?

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PHILIP PECOCCKE

If you've got it, flaunt it

The carpark at BMW's office complex looks more like a showroom. Shiny roundel emblems on impeccable 5 series and Minis impress anyone who passes through. But these cars aren't for sale. They belong to the employees.

BMW's classy reputation, and the luxury and prestige the emblem symbolises, isn't lost on recruits and employees.

"It conjures up some kind of image for those people,

and they start thinking about what it would be like to work there," says Valerie Webster, recruiter and HR consultant for BMW.

Employees' perceptions of an organisation are often based on the company's advertising and marketing, says John Robertson of human resource consultancy John Robertson & Associates. Webster says she makes a point of reminding recruits that they're signing up for a job, not the cushy, leather-swathed ride you see in commercials.

But managing director Geoff Fletcher isn't shy about using the lure of the roundel to get buy-in from staff. Employees who drive a BMW or Mini know to reverse into the car park spaces, so the grill and emblem face out. As part of the induction, new hires get to take a beamer for a leisurely spin. A year later, they can lease one of their own at a special rate, and three-quarters of employees, from receptionists to management, opt into driving a Mini, 3 series, X5 series or 7 series, depending on rank. Sometimes it's just part of your package.

Brand isn't skin deep, though. A strong brand conveys a set of values and a vision, and these are two critical factors in the decision-making process for recruits, says Vaughn Bradley, director of Haines, an employment branding consultancy. If BMW's image is about quality and luxury, it has to deliver more than just cars to employees.

For receptionist Stacy Sanderson, working at BMW lives up to the luxury brand image it portrays. "I've worked for a lot of companies where you've got to struggle. Here, everything you ask for is validated," she says. "There's none of this, 'you've got to continue struggling with antiquated equipment'."

Megan Hutton, a recently hired sales and marketing PA, likes the reaction she gets from family and friends when she tells them where she works. "They say 'Oh, wow! Do you get to drive one?'" It makes me proud to tell people I work for BMW," says Hutton, who has to wait a few months yet to lease a car.

BMW's brand image of status and success inspires achievement among employees, says Fletcher, which feeds back into the strength of the brand. Sounds like an excellent marketing approach.



Geoff Fletcher: employee pride feeds the brand



Taylor made bank

Denise McNabb meets Catherine Taylor, HR manager of the year

At Kiwibank's Wellington headquarters fishing is the go. Plastic fish, mind. The tank with its little rods where staff can hook a green moray or a fluorescent tuna is a favourite meeting place in the open-plan office. It also happens to be quite near HR manager Catherine Taylor's desk — which is nice, because Taylor could have been one lonely lass. Taylor joined the New Zealand Post banking project team when it was still a pup in May 2001. Her mandate was to build an operational structure, set up the human resources function for the new bank and develop and roll out training on the new bank's system. Back then, Taylor was a "one person band" preparing all paperwork relating to recruitment, doing payroll co-ordination, providing human resource advice, being involved in difficult people issues and providing counselling.

A key challenge was recruiting staff when the bank was attracting such negative publicity (it was called "Jim's Bank" for many months, after the brains behind its creation, politician Jim Anderton). "We had to work hard to convince people with the calibre we required, that the bank would be around for a long time. And if the bank was going to succeed it was up to them to contribute. They really did count."

Above all she had to create a culture that was quite separate but complementary to New Zealand Post where most of the bank's staff worked.

How did she succeed? Hard work, for a start. In the early days the job turned out to be round the clock. Files went home with Taylor frequently, a challenge for the mother of two, but offset by an understanding partner. The excitement of a start-up has its appeal too. "Kiwibank was such a dream opportunity that you don't get often," she says. "We wanted to achieve the results and take pride in our work so we made sure we delivered."

Now Taylor is making it look easy. A steady stream of CVs filling her in-tray is testament to the attractiveness of the place. The bank is growing fast with 176,400 customers (last count was in September), deposits of \$554 million and \$620 million in loans. Kiwibank has set a goal of profitability by the end of June 2005.

As for those fish, they're not in the tank for nothing. Kiwibank, like the Ford Motor Company, Southwest Airlines and Chevron is a disciple of fish philosophy — a management technique that came out of a book observing the fun staff had with fish at the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle. The philosophy is based on attitude, playing at work, making a customer's day and being in the moment. If fishmongers can do it, surely a bank can?

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MATT GRACE

HR Initiative of the Year

Wnt a fone wth tht?

McDonald's makes a connection between mobiles and happy, young staff

It seems the New Zealand arm of fast-food restaurant operator McDonald's could teach its overseas counterparts a thing or two about keeping its young staff sweet.

In the four months since every young employee was given a mobile phone, staff turnover is beginning to shrink; restaurant managers are finding it easier to roster replacements for sick staff by putting out text calls via web-based eTXT; and text-based internal competitions are attracting thousands of entries.

The idea for the phones came from internal research. When the company asked just how it could be more relevant and responsive to its mostly young staff the answer was unanimous: cellphones! At the time of the survey McDonald's was rolling out its "I'm lovin' it" marketing campaign to staff worldwide. A cellphone in every employee's hand and they would be lovin' their employer as well as being able to communicate efficiently.

Of the 6500 staff at 148 restaurants nationwide, 66% are under 20 and 26% are aged between 20 and 29. The cellphone plan became reality with Telecom sourcing the large consignment of Nokia 2280s — snazzy, bells and whistles models with WAP and picture capability — essential for maximum appeal.

2003 HR Initiative of the Year

Regional winners

Auckland
McDonald's
Restaurants (NZ)

Central North Island
DPA & Associates

Wellington
P&O Nedlloyd
NZ Post

Southern
City Care

The telco also set up eTXT, a web-based facility that emails text messages to multiple recipients as well as access to a corporate WAP at no cost to employees so they can keep up with competitions, national events and important information. To kick-start the scheme, each phone was loaded by McDonald's with a \$10 prepay credit. Prepay also got around the fact that some of the staff were not old enough to have mobile accounts.

Completing the culture war are crew rallies. Last year rallies were held at 24 venues across the country with concerts featuring top Kiwi bands and movie premieres as well as shows of "I'm lovin' it" training videos to demonstrate new customer service requirements.

HR manager Evelyn Gates says the success of the initiative has come from empowering the young staff to be involved. For example the training video used McDonald's own staff who spoke in a tone that was relevant to the young employees — as they had requested in the survey.

And now it turns out that other McDonald's operators overseas have more than a passing interest. Some may soon follow the Kiwi lead, says Gates.

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Building great workplaces

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