

## Empowerment Award Entrant: Xero Limited



Making gender diversity a priority has helped Xero become a leader in the technology sector when it comes to the number of women in its workforce.

The technology industry is particularly poor when it comes to the statistics around females working in the sector. In fact, on average women comprise only 29 per cent of the workforce across technology companies.

But at Xero this figure is 38 per cent, well above the industry average. Even in the technical/product side of the business, women represent 27 per cent of the workforce, which is higher than most global technology brands where women comprise on average 15 per cent of the technical workforce.

Xero is a dynamic, progressive and expanding global software company with offices in New Zealand, Australia, United States, United Kingdom and Singapore and more than 1500 staff, 850 based in New Zealand.

“Diversity has always been a part of our DNA. From our inception we’ve sought to build and maintain a diverse workforce,” says Andy Burner, General Manager Global People Programs.

Xero has been implementing gender diversity initiatives for the past eight years, introducing a formal Diversity Action Plan in September 2015.

"We implement best-practice recruitment in terms of gender diversity and review the language we use when writing job descriptions to ensure we attract both genders," Andy says.

The company has also implemented a world class HR system, Workday, so it can track and report to leaders the current gender split.

"We don't discriminate - there is no pay gap between men and women within the same role, we recruit based on merit and we work to eliminate any unconscious bias." Recently two pregnant employees were promoted despite the fact they were going on maternity leave.

The company's 'Managing at Xero' training programme supports leaders managing a diverse workforce, focusing on gender diversity. So far 70 per cent of leaders at Xero have completed the training. The company's parental leave policy goes beyond the minimum legal requirements and Xero has a flexible working policy.

"Through our social media platform, Yammer, and Intranet, Jostle, we communicate the importance of gender diversity via articles, comments, announcements and news. Yammer, in particular, encourages employees to contribute to open and candid discussion and debate through this medium," Andy says.

"Each fortnight we host a company-wide 'All Hands' global meeting. It's streamed live to our offices globally and our CEO ensures we have women presenting as often as possible and we continue to communicate key messages and announcements about gender diversity."

Several times a year the company hosts female students in the office to show them what it's like to work in the tech industry and encourage them to think about a career at Xero, and it also ensures fair female representation on the company blog, in media interviews and at external events such as conferences.

Xero CEO Rod Drury ensures gender diversity is a priority for the company. "Given our product is used by accountants and bookkeepers, an industry where women have strong representation, having a matching mix of perspective developing these products gives us competitive advantage from more traditional companies in the new global economy," he says.

Other senior leaders play a role in promoting the diversity agenda and all leaders are encouraged to attend events and speaking opportunities around the issue of gender diversity.

In a diversity and inclusion staff survey earlier this year, 92 per cent of respondents rated the statement 'I believe Xero supports diversity in the workplace' as a three or higher (out of five).

The number of women in senior leadership positions within top management ranks has increased, including New Zealand Managing Director Anna Curzon, Chief Accounting Officer Kirsty Godfrey-Billy and Chief People Officer Rachael Powell.

“Last year we had a record number of women promoted. Just in our Customer Experience team alone, 63 per cent of those employees promoted were women,” says Andy.

“We are very proud to say that as part of our world class Graduate Program, our internships (which funnel talent into our graduate roles) have a 43 per cent female representation.”

The company believes having a more gender-balanced workplace than most organisations in the tech industry is one of the reasons for its success, says Andy.

Xero recognises there is more work to be done but feedback from women working at the company reflects the progress to date.

“I’ve never really thought about my gender being an issue because it never has been at Xero, which is what I love about working here. I’m a solo mum of one. Xero trusts, supports and empowers me to be a professional career woman and a mum. I get to be a rock star in both worlds,” says Global Engagement Advisor Ally Naylor.

Xero Global Head of Talent Carrie O’Meara-Malcolm says, “I have felt enormous support from Xero since I returned to work in a senior role after being on maternity leave for a year. Not only was I able to come back on a part-time basis, which I really valued, but I have been able to work from home when I have needed it. I feel very fortunate to work for a company that really ‘walks the talk’ and values their people, understanding that this will ultimately benefit the employee and organisation as a whole.”