

Empowerment Award Entrant: Countdown

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229800613>

What started as an informal chat between senior and store management at Countdown has resulted in the rollout of two life-changing programmes.

The get together was just before Christmas in 2015 between the GM of Human Resources, HR Manager of Operations and 12 female store managers.

The informal agenda was to gather thoughts about why women were holding off applying for higher positions in stores.

Progressive Enterprises operates 185 Countdown stores, four distributions centres and a meat processing plant and is currently New Zealand's largest private sector employer. What concerns Countdown is that women make up 56 percent of the more than 18,000-strong workforce, but just four percent are in leadership roles, throughout Progressive Enterprises.

The first development programme was targeted at stores where there is the biggest imbalance of women in leadership roles.

The Stores Women in Leadership Forum pilot workshop comprised 12 female Store Managers (from the December group chat) along with 12 female Customer Service Managers.

The objective was to encourage more women to apply for Store Manager, Group Manager or Operations Manager positions. The workshop agenda covered raising awareness, statistics, personal brand and development planning.

"Whilst the forum is still in its infancy stages we already have evidence of women moving roles from smaller to larger stores, giving them greater financial responsibility," says Leadership and Development Specialist Jenny Gunn.

Throughout New Zealand 240 female leaders have now attended workshops. The third workshop is planned between August and September this year. The success of this forum has led to this programme being a permanent event.

The support for the programmes started at the top and filtered throughout management who were willing to remove women from the business for the half day sessions spread over eight weeks.

Progressive Enterprises Managing Director Dave Chambers is committed to change: "A key focus for Countdown is empowering women. We have a diverse outstanding team of more than 18,000 Kiwis, however our leadership structures do not fully reflect this. We know that to live our purpose of 'Making Kiwis lives a little better every day' we must strive to achieve greater leadership diversity."

The second initiative, the Springboard Women's Development Programme was focussed on empowering women.

"We felt we needed to tackle the challenge of confidence and self-belief before leadership," says Jenny. "This led us to rolling out a pilot programme for Springboard, available to any woman at any career level.

"The curriculum was designed to enable women to identify the clear and realistic steps they want to take to make a better world for themselves, at work and home, whilst building the practical skills and confidence to take these steps."

A total of 51 women took part from the Stores, Logistics and Corporate teams. Another 24 women are about to start Springboard journeys.

Feedback has been encouraging - Trudy Raill (promoted): "During my time on the Springboard programme I moved to a completely different part of the business. Initially I was nervous about making such a big change, but doing the course made me feel more comfortable within myself...that I could do this! When we spoke about the difference between men and women in regards to how much they need to 'tick off' to be able to apply for roles, that really resonated with me."

Kaye Dinnan had a weight loss goal: "Springboard gave me the foundation to work on where I needed to improve in both my personal and work life. The first step was to look at myself more positively; my wellbeing was the most important aspect. Changing my attitude and mindset, I sorted out what direction I needed to head in, and the results since my last Springboard session have been fantastic, with everything in my life falling into place. I can't speak highly enough of the programme, the instructor, and the friendships of those who attended. This for me is life-changing."