

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Entrant: GHD



Professional services company GHD has identified that its young employees like to have a voice, value flexibility and sustainability more than any other generation and want to work somewhere they feel valued.

And so the company, which works across a booming infrastructure industry, decided to put something in place to address those needs.

GHD is one of the world's leading professional services companies operating in the global markets of water, energy and resources, environment, property and buildings, and transportation. The New Zealand business was established in 1999 and now has 415 employees working across the country.

GHD's answer was the Young Professionals (YP) Programme. Targeted toward employees in the first 10 years of their professional career, the programme was developed to engage YPs, provide a platform for them to have a voice and to be able to influence not only their own future, but also the future of the business.

The programme started with the NZ General Manager challenging this group to develop a business plan to present to the NZ Management Team. They were asked to consider how and where they could help the business meet its strategic objectives, and to provide a view on what they thought GHD would look like in the future.

The group seized the opportunity and proposed a plan based around four key pillars they felt passionate about, and where they felt they could make a difference. These were personal development, networking, community engagement and sustainability.

With the opportunity to present to the New Zealand Management team, and to get involved in making a difference to GHD's business, the programme quickly gained momentum.

Important to the YPs was the ability to take full ownership of the plan to ensure they felt like it was a programme built to meet their needs. Getting involved in this level of planning, strategy, programme management and budgeting was an opportunity that most had not been previously exposed to.

Sub-committees at a national level were created to support each pillar of the programme, with YPs asked to choose which they were interested in. Each committee then developed their plan further, setting clear objectives and outcomes for the year. This final plan was presented to the Management Group who agreed to fund and support the plan and invest resource and budget to make it happen.

Bill Harrington, YP Programme Leader in Christchurch, explains how he benefited from being involved. "The programme has provided me with the opportunity to take the initiative and organise a wide range of events. This involvement has widened my networking horizons and helped to build my personal profile. It has also provided a space for ongoing development of presentation and business planning skills alongside core day-to-day project work."

Each part of the programme has contributed to GHD's overall business success. As an example, the YP networking series has led to the YPs becoming well networked, helping to raise the profile of GHD across all levels in the professional services industry. The series is run three times a year across main centres, and involves YPs connecting with other YPs at client and industry organisations over a networking breakfast. The group organise their own event and speaker, who give their time voluntarily. Each series addresses a key personal development topic. The level of speaker is high and in the past has included John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand (at the time).

GHD wants to be seen in the community as a positive contributor and supporters of local initiatives, creating lasting community benefit. Close relationships developed with Habitat for Humanity, Engineers without Borders and Futureintech are helping achieve that. GHD is also closely associated with Volunteer Services Abroad (VSA), and supports its people to get involved in opportunities overseas, where they can utilise their skills to work in communities that need them.

Strides have also been made in sustainability. The YP program has taken the lead in this area and is challenging GHD's business to be more engaged on sustainability initiatives. The group worked with the sustainability committee recently on a waste audit across our offices, reporting on how much waste each office was creating. As a result the committee have set targets to reduce this over the year.

"Being part of the Young Professionals group has provided me with a number of opportunities that I would not necessarily otherwise have had, including speaking on behalf of GHD at community events. This has helped me to improve my presentation skills, my networking skills and also made me more comfortable presenting in front of my peers. The biggest take-away I have from the Young Professionals programme however, is the confidence to share my knowledge and express my ideas. I feel like I have a voice!" - Bradley Schwalger, Young Professional at GHD

"As a developing young professional, the more experience I gain the more I realise just how important the non-technical aspects of my career are. As a participant in the Smart Seeds 2016 program I gained invaluable experience that would be impossible to find elsewhere. Coming up with solutions to some of New Zealand's most challenging issues with an amazing group of strangers! It was a great opportunity to network, build and nurture a team, utilise project management planning techniques and do something a little outside my normal work. Not to mention the daunting task of presenting our solutions to industry leaders." - Joe Brenan, Smart Seeds participant 2016