

Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Fatu Patolo, Coca-Cola Amatil NZ



Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229802487>

Fatu Patolo's leadership in the manufacturing and supply division at Coca-Cola Amatil NZ is extraordinary. Under his initiatives health and safety have improved, staff are communicating better and lives have been turned around.

Every one of his 63 staff report they feel their employer cares about their wellbeing, and overall engagement is now at 90 per cent, an exceptional score for a large team.

Fatu is CSD Oasis Manufacturing Manager at Coca-Cola Amatil NZ, and has been with the company for 23 years.

Fatu spent his childhood years in Samoa, coming to New Zealand at an early age after being awarded a school scholarship at New Plymouth Boys High School. His wider family is now settled with him in New Zealand.

Fellow leaders and team members best describe how Fatu models leadership:

"Fatu sets the culture in the CSD plant" – Tony Forrest, Fatu's Manager and National Manufacturing Manager.

"If you're struggling he's in there boots and all....we will go the extra mile for him because it's reciprocal. He's a good role model...I talk to my team the way he talks to us." – Murray Monaghan, direct report and Group Leader

"I came in on my day off to tell you about Fatu's leadership.... I wanted to do that for him." – Richa Chandel, direct report and Production Analyst.

Fatu is clearly well regarded but it is the stories of impact on his staff that he would be most proud of.

Aspire 2 Business is one example of an initiative instigated and led by Fatu that has had a positive impact. The programme focuses on improving reading and budgeting skills. Fatu pushed for the project because he was confident it would have benefits for both employees and the company.

Tony Forrest says Fatu was very persistent in asking for the programme, and insisting the classes happen in company time. "It has changed the culture through improved communication. Employees are more confident to speak up now, so we are getting more valuable input into the day-to-day running of the plant."

In terms of business impact, quality levels have exceeded targets as a result of more effective communication.

Fatu's team is ethnically diverse (Chinese, Indian, Iraqi, Māori, Niuean, Pilipino, Samoan, Tongan, Ni-Vanuatu) with a large proportion of Polynesian employees (more than 50 per cent).

Improved literacy has meant employees can now read company documentation with greater understanding which has led to an increase in health and safety reporting.

"I am able to give better and more precise instructions to temps and as a result, it has helped improve the overall level of safety within the production team," says one staff member who completed Aspire 2 Business.

Numeracy has also improved for all employees who took part. Employees are now completing on the job numeracy tasks more accurately and efficiently. There has been feedback the programme has also helped employees with their personal finances as they are now better equipped to manage their pay.

Fatu's leadership is evidenced by the success of the programme. He "took the risk" by running the programme in work time. Over the five month period while the programme took place, not once did production slip below existing levels.

One participant said, "Everything in the programme has made me proud of myself, it has opened up new avenues to explore".

Another participant noted he now felt he could open up to management on any issues.

There have been no disciplinary procedures for failure to follow process in 2016, which Fatu credits to increased understanding of written instructions and confidence to ask questions.

Employees report that they have shared what they learnt at home and now have better relationships and communication with their children and partners. The budgeting training has had a concrete measurable outcome in that there have been no financial hardship claims since training commenced.

The programme is now being introduced to the wider supply chain. In 2017 it will be repeated for day shift manufacturing for staff who want to improve further. Additional programmes will also be launched for night shift manufacturing and logistics staff.

Fatu is well known for stepping beyond his role to help others. Auckland Logistics Manager Richard Algar describes a typical example of this: "I recently acted in the role of Auckland Logistics Manager while we were filling a vacancy and I noticed we had a health and safety issue in the warehouse. The staff are predominately Polynesian so I asked Fatu to come and talk to the night shift employees to find out how we could improve the situation.

"He spent a lot of his own time talking to them, establishing trust and took a different approach to influencing them. Rather than it being about rules he emphasised getting home safely to your family - the team look up to him, he worked hard to establish relationships and he wanted to be welcomed and trusted. Even though the health and safety project has been successfully concluded he is still visiting the night shift guys in his own time - sometimes at 3am!"

Chris Taumoepeau's story is another that illustrates Fatu's impact: "I started in the plant after the 7th form in a summer job. I was young and naughty and ended up on a final written warning. Fatu sat me down for a big talk and said I had potential and he had high hopes for me and that if I would work hard he would take another chance. He is always looking for guys to improve themselves. That was 11 years ago. Now I am the team leader leading eight people."