

Walk the Talk Award Entrant: Mark Forsyth, Z Energy

When Shell service stations rebranded to become Z Energy, the Retailers, who are the independent business owners who operate clusters of Z stations, predominantly from one demographic and had lots in common about how they went about things.

Z General Manager, Retail, Mark Forsyth, could see that the approach delivered consistently similar results. What was missing was the value that people with diverse experiences and perspectives bring.

He took a stand for having a team of Retailers who better reflected the neighbourhoods in which they operate and made his expectation clear to his leadership team. Initial attempts to attract different candidates were not successful so Mark provided the support needed to take more time and resources to explore different channels to achieve that.

Mark encouraged his team to change their attraction and recruitment strategy for Retailers, to bring in a variety of outstanding people with diverse backgrounds, skills, ideas and cultures.

“We tried building different networks, using business brokers who were connected to different cultural communities and we revamped the way we selected Retailers by building a high performance model and using psychometric testing to reduce unconscious bias,” says Alana Pollock, Business Development Manager, Retail.

“In three years, the Z Retailer population has become the strongest and most successful it has ever been,” she says.

“The new people we have brought in perform well in their own business and the contribution they make is challenging the thinking and bringing new ideas to the other Retailers.”

The Z Retailer network is made up of 204 sites with approximately 2,500 staff. Larry Tupa'i-Lavea, whose business Aiga Energy now operates four Z sites near his home and community in Mangere Auckland, is one example of the success of the new approach. Core to encouraging diversity is that Retailers are reflective of and immersed in the communities they operate sites in. To make this happen Mark and the recruiting team backed Larry, who was an operations manager for another Auckland Retailer, to move up to running his own cluster of sites.

His ^[GB1] cultural background was a great fit for the community and reflective of the cultural diversity in Auckland. He was able to bring his ability and passion for building networks with cultural groups into the recruitment of staff for his team, resulting in a change the demographics of his site teams.

Larry is bringing a new perspective on how to make things happen, generating a new type of leadership in the Auckland area and challenging the Retailer population on ideas and insights.

In the Waikato there is another example of Mark's successful support of diversity. Briar was a Z Business Development Manager for five years when she decided it was time for a new opportunity. Mark supported her into the role of Z Retailer, managing 10 sites in and around her hometown of Hamilton.

Briar was encouraged to take on the Retailer role with the support of Mark, who played a critical role in mentoring her and promoting gender equity with her placement to ensure she was supported to be successful in the start-up phase of her business.

Briar balances having a family with being committed to her personal development in her career and is thriving as Retailer, having significant impact on the business in a short time as evidenced by her team engagement and overall financial results.

"Being clear on the capabilities a successful Retailer needs and then using psychometric testing to assess candidates has been so insightful. We have had candidates that felt like they were going to be great only to find that they did not have what was needed and on the flip side have been pleasantly surprised by others."

"We have found that this reduces unconscious bias and has helped us to select Retailers who are not only diverse in the things above the iceberg, but also those below such as abilities, under-pressure behaviours and personality," says Alana

"The five Retailers we have brought on since introducing the model all bring something different which enhances the capability, customer intimacy and performance of the whole team."

Mark has been a key sponsor and champion of a programme aimed at rewarding and acknowledging staff at site level, The Heroes Awards. Winners are flown in to a gala event in their honour where frontline staff are recognised for their achievements - standouts in their roles as customer service representatives - baristas, site leaders and forecourt concierges.

"What is distinctive about this event is how the teams who attend are encouraged to be themselves and the way they proudly share their diverse cultures with each other is so inspiring," says Alana.

"The difference you can make when you celebrate success and take the time to recognise the people making the difference to our customers has a massive impact on the overall business success in each region and overall of Z," says Alana.