

Work Life Balance Award Entrant: GHD



Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229803382>

A 12.5-hour window in which to complete a day's work, the ability to buy an extra two weeks of holiday, part-time hours and technology that means you can do your job anywhere there is an internet connection is all part of the flexible culture at GHD.

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.

"Our workforce is changing; baby boomers are nearing retirement, women make up a larger percentage of the workforce, technology is advancing at a rapid rate and Gen Y employees value flexibility more than any other generation. At GHD, we recognise this shift in expectations and that the 'one size fits all' approach no longer works for many of our people," says Support Services Manager Sheryl Cornelius.

With so much infrastructure development going on across the country, attracting and retaining the best talent is a challenge, and retention of women in an industry already heavily dominated by men is an issue GHD faces on a daily basis.

To address those issues, and empower staff to find a way of working that works for them, the company put in place a flexible working policy in 2011. Key initiatives include:

- Part-time work – fewer days or fewer hours; staff can find the mix that works for them.
- Flexible hours – staff can work their hours between 6.30am and 7pm, providing a 12.5-hour work window. If they need to work outside of these hours, they can propose this with their manager. This provides the ability to avoid rush-hour traffic, manage family commitments and achieve a healthy work-life balance.
- The 50/52 policy – staff can buy an extra two weeks' holiday each year, increasing their entitlement to six weeks. Rather than taking unpaid leave, 50 weeks' worth of salary is paid over 52 weeks, making month-to-month budgeting easier to manage.

- A connected workplace – systems are set up so staff can work from anywhere there is an internet connection.

The flexible working policy is available to all staff and forms part of the induction process. To ensure the initiatives keep up to date with a changing workforce, GHD's Diversity and Inclusion Committee regularly reviews the policy.

Managing flexible team members can be challenging, so GHD developed a Managing Flexible Working Arrangements workshop, covering the options that are available for staff, and how to manage requests and the different working options. This ensures having staff working flexibly does not affect other team members or project delivery.

The flexible working practices have the full support of the Management team at GHD, and several of its members and other senior staff regularly work from home or work flexible hours due to long commutes or family commitments. GHD's Asia Pacific General Manager and Head of People, HR and Marketing both work on a 50/52 arrangement for family reasons, 'living' the culture of working flexibly.

"Our Management team sets KPIs regarding staff turnover, and if this is too high it may mean working at GHD is too hard. We gather specific feedback in staff exit interviews. It becomes clear very quickly if we are losing people due to inflexible working environments and we hold ourselves accountable for this. Our managers will then come together to discuss what we need to change," says Sheryl Cornelius. "At a global level, a key objective of our Board is to increase the percentage of women in our business. To achieve this, flexible working arrangements are key."

The new ways of working have not had a negative impact on growth and GHD continues to exceed its business targets each year, she says. Staff are happier and the policy contributes to the company's ability to retain top talent.

"There has been a real shift created in the cultural acceptance of flexible working as a legitimate and valuable way of delivering quality outcomes for our clients and business.

"In our staff survey in 2015, our culture of flexible working was listed as one of the best things about working at GHD.

The most recent survey also showed that 89 per cent of employee agreed with the statement, 'I have the freedom and flexibility to do my job effectively.'

For staff, the policies have ensured a better work-life balance.

Trent, a graduate, is one of the 25 per cent of GHD staff utilising the 50/52 initiative.

"I play hockey at an elite level and wanted to continue whilst starting out as a graduate. The time commitments outside of work are significant; attending training camps and national tournaments use up my annual leave pretty quickly. The 50/52 program provides me with additional leave to allocate towards playing hockey."

Marketing and Communications Manager Sarah Mason recently returned to work after having her second child. "I was nervous about starting back full time, so discussed with my manager the possibility of working just four days. We tweaked my role so that I could work my requested days. I was also able to start back two days a week for the first two months, so I could ease my children into daycare and ease myself back into working life."

Flexible working options are not just for women – 35 per cent of the GHD staff working part-time are men. Justin, a senior manager, works flexible hours on a fortnightly rotation. "I look after my kids one week on, one week off. This means that my work cycle works around a fortnight instead of a week. It makes a big difference to my life that I can come into work later in the morning and make up the hours at other times."