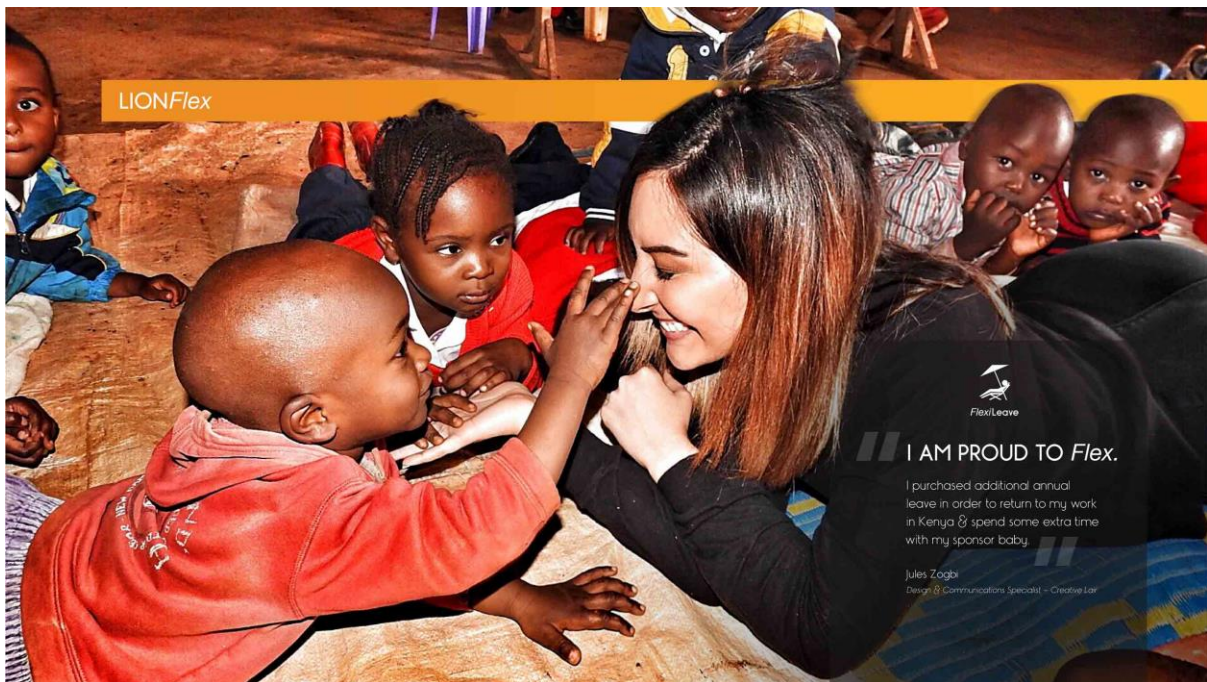


Work Life Balance Award Entrant: Lion



Video link: <https://vimeo.com/album/4446506/video/229803041>

Banishing the perception flexible working was 'just for carers', changing a company-wide meeting culture, improving technology and being courageous enough to change the status quo have been key to developing flexible work practices that are raising staff engagement and improving wellness at Lion.

The company, which can trace its roots in New Zealand back to 1840, is the country's largest alcohol beverage company, focusing on production, marketing, sales and distribution of beer, wine, spirits, cider and ready-to-drink products, as well as a range of non-alcohol beverages. It has about 1000 NZ-based staff.

People and Culture Director Robin Davies says the business developed its LionFlex programme to meet people's changing needs and to ensure it could continue to attract and retain top talent.

Lion's 2014 diversity survey showed that almost 40 per cent of the workforce would require flexible work options in forthcoming years, and while the option to work flexibly had always been available, it was not championed cohesively across the company, and was seen as intended mainly for parents.

A series of "flexperiments" in 2015 and 2016, where team members across various business functions trialled flexible work arrangements, gave the company important insights into barriers to flexibility at Lion, including a stigma (real and perceived) around utilising flexibility options, a culture where people felt they needed to present in the office for meetings or miss out on information, technology that did not support efficient remote working, and a reluctance to change the existing ways of working.

Lion Group Chief Executive Officer Stuart Irvine relaunched the flexibility policy as LionFlex in May 2016. It had four categories for flexibility:

- FlexiPlace – working from a safe and productive location outside of your usual workplace
- FlexiLeave – the ability to purchase up to two weeks' additional leave, utilising unpaid leave, plus up to two paid volunteer days per year.
- FlexiSchedule – varying start and finish times or altering work schedules (for example starting early and finishing early to avoid congestion).
- FlexiRole --re-designing a role to enable job sharing or role sharing (for example part-time or job share arrangements).

It was communicated to staff via email and Q&A sessions, and an intranet site was launched as a 'one-stop shop' for information on LionFlex.

To counter perceived stigma around flexible working, a Proud to Flex initiative was launched, including a video, screensavers, posters and a Yammer campaign that challenged the stereotype of flexible working arrangements being only for those with family commitments.

A practical toolkit was developed to change the default "meeting culture" and a Meeting Manifesto poster was displayed around Lion buildings to remind people that "how we spend our days is how we spend our lives – don't spend your lives in meetings!"

Updating technology to solve issues people were having accessing the network remotely or dialling into meetings became a major focus and significant resources are being invested to ensure technology is fully flex-capable.

Guidelines were put in place to address the reluctance to change the status quo – the new starting point was that a flexible request can be satisfied, unless there is a significant business reason why it cannot. "This empowered people to confidently approach their leaders to have a conversation about flexible work options," says Robin Davies.

Members of the Group Leadership Team (encompassing business units across Australia, New Zealand and Asia) actively championed LionFlex by sharing the flexible working styles used and supported within their teams.

All of the NZ Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members have the same LionFlex-related achievement goal (linked to annual remuneration outcomes): More than 70% of their teams must respond favourably to the question "my commitment would be questioned if I chose to use flexible work options" in the engagement survey.

Lion is currently rated the number one talent brand in New Zealand on LinkedIn when measured against a peer set that includes Air NZ, Fonterra and Coca-Cola Amatil. Lion's ranking improvement aligned with the launch and embedding of the LionFlex policy.

Engagement surveys also provide evidence of the tangible benefits of LionFlex to staff engagement and the organisation. Team members who work fulltime and access

LionFlex have higher levels of engagement (93%) than those who do not (89%), a better sense of wellbeing (88% versus 84%), and a more favourable perception of their leader's leadership (87% versus 82%).

Since the policy has been introduced, there has been a nine per cent increase in the number of staff who disagree with the statement "my commitment would be questioned if I chose to use flexible work options", and in 2016, 42 per cent of Lion's New Zealand staff were accessing LionFlex.

National Commercial Manager - Operations & Logistics Lachlan Boyle is one of them. "Working flexibly really allows me to pursue my passion in triathlon, which I enjoy and also keeps me going with my wellbeing goal; both mentally and physically."

Facilities Executive Tess Haywood says, "When I took my current role I wasn't in a position to relocate to Auckland. I had recently moved to Rotorua and my partner has a business there so LionFlex was the perfect solution."

For South Island Operations Winemaker Matt Large, the policy has meant an extra half day off in summer. "Over summertime in Marlborough we decided to change our hours. We worked out that if we worked an extra hour Monday to Thursday then we could finish at lunch time on a Friday."

"LionFlex presented an opportunity for us to reiterate how we measure success - by achievement against outcomes, not by hours spent at a desk," says Robin Davies. "Flexing' has become part of the Lion vocabulary, and team members and leaders are starting to challenge each other to make the most of flexible work options."