



## Craig Hudson, Xero

### WALK THE TALK WINNER

**By talking openly about his own mental health struggles, Xero's Craig Hudson has encouraged employees to speak out about their challenges and seek help when needed.**

Craig, who is the Managing Director for Xero New Zealand and Pacific Islands, has shared his experience of living with depression not only with the accounting software company's more than 1200 New Zealand employees, but also with Xero's global networks, and the small businesses it supports here in Aotearoa.

As part of the emphasis on looking after employees' mental health, Craig has championed the introduction of wellbeing leave, flexible working practices, and the development of an inclusive and diverse workplace.

Head of People Experience - NZ Rob Munro says Craig models the initiatives he advocates for, concentrating on work-life balance by caring for his personal life as well as his professional one. That includes working from home when needed, switching off completely while on holiday, and maintaining family commitments.

"Craig will actively talk to his team about what he is doing and why, including taking Wellness Days when he is starting to feel burnt out," he says.

"This sort of role modelling has had a huge impact on our employees and the normalisation of speaking out and seeking help when needed."

Xero employees' score for assessing wellness has increased from 6.9/10 in September 2017 to 7.5/10 in May 2019, and feedback from staff has shown the impact of the initiatives.

One staff member wrote, "There are a lot of great programmes around mental health at Xero. Between our EAP, introducing wellbeing leave and Craig Hudson being a leader in that space, I can tell that mental health is a priority."

Another employee explained how they had been able to make significant progress in their self-care. "I wanted to come and express my gratitude after today's GAH! [Global All Hands]... on a personal note I was moved by Craig's open and honest approach to mental health. I battle this every day and six months ago had my crash point and luckily [my manager] was amazing and let me completely unload my past 20 years of bottled up feelings on her. She recognised my battles with high personal expectations and how I can handle this. She and



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Xero have bent over backwards to accommodate my needs since this day and provide mechanisms and strategies to manage my needs.”

Craig has been hugely influential in putting the spotlight on the stresses small businesses face. This year Xero set up a programme offering mental health support to 5000 small business owners, their employees and families via access to anonymous counselling through its Employment Assistant Programme.

Alongside being a role model and leader in wellness, Craig actively encourages a diverse workplace where team members are free to share their ideas and concerns. “He talks often about looking at a candidate’s whole background rather than just their formal qualifications as he doesn’t believe that a piece of paper is necessarily the only indicator of success, particularly within his own area of Xero,” says Rob.

“Rather, he believes that attitude and aptitude are just as important. To Craig, it is an underpinning structure around common values that drives a team and a business forward. It means you can bring all ideas into a room, challenge one another and come up with the best solutions, but still walk away as friends and with respect for one another.”

Craig’s role includes managing Xero in the Pacific Islands and as part of his commitment to cultural diversity, he is mindful of supporting Māori and Pacific Island employees. He was integral in building a relationship with Tuputoa, a Māori and Pasifika corporate pathway programme. Two Tuputoa interns worked at Xero during the 2018-19 summer and both have continued to work part-time while completing their university studies. Xero has signed on to another year with Tuputoa.

Craig’s leadership style was exemplified in the aftermath of the Christchurch terror attacks, says Rob. “Craig made a real and visible effort during the immediate weeks following and beyond to check in on our staff in Aotearoa, particularly our Muslim whanau. He encouraged us to look out for one another, support one another and to take the time that we needed to deal with the emotions that come with such a terrible incident.”

Initiatives that were quickly set up included travel groups so people didn’t have to travel alone to and from work if they didn’t feel safe, prayer rooms and quiet places for people to pray and reflect, and forums for Muslim staff to support each other.

“Craig showing empathy and leadership at such a tough time for all of us around Aotearoa has really encouraged others to embrace and support our diverse workforce.”

The judging panel said that by stepping up as a leader to talk about his personal experience with mental health, Craig has made it okay for employees to talk about their own challenges, creating a culture of sharing and psychological safety. His backing of the programme offering mental health support to 5000 small business owners in the Xero network widened his impact from employees to customers.

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