



Kensington Swan

EMPOWERMENT FINALIST



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VIDEO**

THE STORY

Gender diversity within law firms and the progression of female lawyers into senior positions has been a significant issue for many years, but Kensington Swan's KS Gender Diversity Initiative has removed some of the traditional barriers holding women back.

Kensington Swan has offices in both Auckland and Wellington and employs more than 100 people. The KS Gender Diversity Initiative includes a range of programme and policies to support female empowerment and encourage a truly gender diverse law firm.

The initiative has been implemented through strong Board, CEO and leadership adoption, however, creating the policies and cultures to underpin these initiatives has been achieved through a strong consultation process with staff at all levels.

Policies include equal pay with pay based on experience and charge-out rates to clients. Industry pay benchmark surveys are shared with employees so the process is transparent. In acknowledging that parental leave is a key point at which salaries fall behind, the firm continues to review salaries while an employee is on parental leave.

The firm's Partnership Deed mandates that the Board is never made up of representatives from only one gender, and CEO Charles Spillane says the firm is working towards removing traditional barriers to partnership for women. "We still have some work to do in that space."

"Partner income is based on contribution, not hours worked. Irrespective of whether a partner works part-time, he or she will still be paid based on relative contribution. This allows for flexible work hours at the senior level," he says.

“Partners who take primary carer leave are paid full drawings for the first three months of their parental leave and return on the same band of contribution as when they left.”

Ongoing training programmes have been implemented to promote a positive culture across the firm. Organisation-wide unconscious bias training was introduced in 2014, and more recently, there has been training around the prevention of workplace harassment.

“The issues the legal profession faces in relation to gender inequality and sexual harassment came to the fore in 2018 and are well documented. The impact of these issues upon employee confidence can be devastating, and this flows through to performance and willingness to pursue development and advancement opportunities,” says Charles.

HR Advisor Hope Dixon says Kensington Swan engaged the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network (SAPN) to provide training around the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace and to run staff engagement sessions. “All staff had the opportunity to attend to discuss culture and provide feedback on a number of policies and practices.”

A group of senior women employees in the Wellington office formed the KenPens (a pen is a female swan), to provide opportunities to share stories, raise issues and support other women. The group has also undertaken confidence training, which aims to remove barriers that employees, particularly women, face in pursuing promotion.

Kensington Swan leadership has adopted a Diversity Statement, created by the Diversity Committee, to ensure that these policies remain relevant, and part of a living process which becomes embedded in the firm culture.

“These initiatives have enabled us to attract, retain and support talented women. We are an attractive option for women who want to make a mid-career change, return to the workforce after parenting, and pursue other interests or attend to other obligations and have a career in their chosen field,” says Charles. “It has enabled us to build a diverse skill-set within our firm that we would not otherwise have if we stuck with a narrow conception of what a high-performing employee looks like.”

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THE CHALLENGE

Gender diversity within law firms and the progression of female lawyers into senior positions, special counsel and partner, has been a significant issue for many years.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- The KS Gender Diversity Initiative has created a culture, supported by initiatives and policies, that has removed some of the traditional barriers to women reaching senior levels. It includes the following:
- Equal pay
- Unconscious bias and training, and training around the prevention of harassment in the workplace
- Targeted confidence and communications training

- Flexible working arrangements



- The Partnership Deed ensures both genders are represented on the Board
- Partner income is based on contribution, not hours worked.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

As of 1 July:

- 39 per cent of full equity partners are female
- 67 percent of Special Counsel are female
- 65 percent of Senior Associates are female
- 40 per cent of the Board is female
- 40 per cent of the Senior Management team is female

KEY LEARNING

The broader skill set, perspective, and life-experience women bring offers wider benefits to the business through the ability they have to mentor and develop others, offer new approaches to traditional ways of working and provide diverse solutions to complex matters.

**DO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WELL
AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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