



First Gas

WORK LIFE BALANCE AWARD FINALIST



THE STORY

In a fast-changing world, First Gas decided it needed to move beyond looking after its staff with physical-wellbeing support. Its new holistic approach takes a much broader view.

Headquartered in New Plymouth but with its staff of 360 working throughout the country, First Gas is New Zealand's largest owner and operator of gas networks, providing natural gas and LPG to more than 165,000 customers nationwide. It also runs New Zealand's largest LPG retailer, Rockgas, and the Ahuroa gas storage facility.

While it has had a strong staff-wellbeing focus since it was formed in 2016, its new holistic-wellbeing programme Got Your Back takes a much bigger picture.

It acknowledges the world is moving faster and that with rising rates of mental illness, suicide and family violence, some of its employees will inevitably be living with challenging issues.

“At First Gas we believe we owe our employees a broader level of support that reflects the highs and lows of real life,” says First Gas Group Chief Executive Paul Goodeve. “We all have pressures outside of work and these impact how people feel each day, how people perform in their role and how resilient people are to challenges. We acknowledge that and support our people to deal with these situations together.”

Got Your Back was designed in-house, bringing in experts and tools tailored specifically for the people at First Gas.

“This culture means people at First Gas know they can bring their whole selves to work,” says General Manager, People & Culture Kellie O’Sullivan. “They know they their back.”

The company’s established physical-wellbeing focus provided annual check-ups, flu vaccines, cancer checks, self-defence classes, and other initiatives, often based around physical fitness.

“We realised if we were serious about supporting our people, we needed to take a broader approach that incorporated not only the body, but the whole person,” says Kellie.

To help, the new approach built on the Māori holistic model of health, te whare tapa whā, with a tailored model drawing on all the different aspects of life to support wellbeing.

First Gas developed an intranet site that offers articles, tools and links to providers, grouped under the wellbeing pillars of mind, body, habits and relationships.

Senior management led a 24-month programme based on taking a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, ensuring what was offered was employee-centric, and supporting the company’s wider community.

The company’s People & Culture, and Health, Safety, Environment & Quality teams worked closely together on the programme to deliver a cohesive employee experience.

The initiative’s formal roll-out began with the launch of mental-health and financial-awareness programmes. More are planned, on topics such as addiction, family violence and suicide prevention.

“We know that for many of our people these topics are deeply personal, and not usually shared with colleagues or within workplaces,” says Kellie. “For that reason, we take great care with our support. We curate every article, every tool and every referral organisation we promote. We also partner with experts, to provide a depth of knowledge that we can’t find alone.”

Company leaders have strongly backed the initiative by blogging, personal attendance and agreeing to champion different topics.

The holistic approach appears to be paying dividends. Already-low sick-leave use is down and positive staff engagement is up. First Gas has also noticed more and better candidates applying for jobs. “We believe this is linked to our reputation of genuinely supporting our people,” says Kellie.

In May 2020, the company asked staff how supported they felt from a wellbeing perspective, scoring a rating of 4.4 out of 5, which was seen as a major endorsement following the upheaval of the Covid-19 lockdown.

As an example of that workplace response, a First Gas property manager says staff are treated like the company’s greatest asset. “The importance given to staff’s wellbeing – mental, physical and financial – is fantastic.”

Kellie says First Gas is committed to building a strong, resilient workplace. “We’ve still got a journey ahead, but we’re proud of the bold steps we’ve taken and will continue to make into the future. First Gas is already a great place to work – and it is only going to get better.”

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THE CHALLENGE

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STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

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RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- Sick-leave use is down and staff engagement up.
- Job applications have increased, as has the standard of applicants.
- Staff score First Gas highly for wellbeing support.

KEY LEARNING

Building a resilient workplace requires bold steps. Rather than rest on its staff-support laurels, First Gas identified the need for a broader approach – and is already seeing the benefits.

First Gas Limited
651 followers
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Last Friday we launched our new bullying and harassment policy and recognised Pink (or Salmon) Shirt day whether at home or in the office (even though the official Pink Shirt day events have been postponed this year).

First Gas is a place where we care about one another, where we want people to feel safe, included and positive about coming to work.

Kōrero mai, kōrero atu, mauri tū, mauri ora. Speak up, stand together, stop bullying.

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

Visit diversityworks.nz or call 0800 DIVERSITY (0800 348 377)