

Cultural Celebration Award Highly Commended: ASB Bank Ltd.

Ma mu aka kite a muri, ma muri ka ora a mua; Those who lead give sight to those who follow, those behind give life to those ahead.

ASB opened its doors in 1847 with the pledge to 'serve the community; to grow; and to help kiwis grow.' Today, more than 1.3 million personal, business and rural customers choose to bank with ASB.

ASB is committed to fostering an inclusive workplace culture where diversity of thought is encouraged and different backgrounds are embraced.

The bank's vision is to be an 'unbeatable team delivering unbeatable service'.

Central to this vision is an inclusive and supportive culture, where staff of all backgrounds are given opportunities to flourish, and where leaders reflect the diversity of the organisation, customers and community.

As part of ASB's drive to diversify their future leadership, Whakaterehia - ASB's Māori Acceleration Programme - was born.

ASB recognised that while Māori comprise approximately 15% of the New Zealand population, the proportion of the ASB workforce who identify as Māori is considerably lower. Particularly concerning was the lack of Māori representation at senior management levels and in the attraction of young talented graduates.

Whakaterehia is a Māori word meaning acceleration. ASB's Whakaterehia programme was run for the first time in 2014-15, aiming to identify and develop a cohesive group of talented Māori employees who are ready for new opportunities and higher leadership positions. It is an accredited one-year programme aimed at accelerating the development of Māori people managers by providing practical leadership skills - leading people, leading the business and leading themselves.

The programme covers a range of business topics such as communication, accounting principles, HR management, applied (project) management and leadership. Most participants do not have a relevant business qualification, so by developing these skills and providing the opportunity to obtain a Diploma in Management, ASB aims to equip participants to progress to more senior roles.

Participants are also asked to be involved in a relevant business community project to further embed their skills and foster stronger relationships with communities. Current participants are investigating partnerships with schools and universities to inspire and attract young Māori talent to the organisation.

ASB Chief Executive Barbara Chapman is delighted with the results of the inaugural Whakaterehia programme.

“The cohort has already proven the programme’s worth by exceeding our expectations to date. More than just achieving great course results, the group has also formed a strong alliance with each other and has been inspired to take on new responsibilities, acting as mentors for younger talent within the bank.”

The manager of each participant is asked to commit to working with their direct report to help them manage their time. Participants are released from work for about 15 days during the year and, where needed, managers offer further study leave to ensure their people can juggle the demands of work and study.

Furthermore, each participant is matched with a senior mentor from within the business to work on the individual’s specific development needs.

Whakaterehia participant Ilesha Cooper, an ASB sales and service manager in central Auckland, is particularly inspired by the mentoring she has received on the programme.

“The most interesting part of Whakaterehia is all the great leaders and mentors that we have the privilege of meeting from within and outside ASB, and hearing about the steps they have taken in becoming successful and inspirational leaders. I have been able to take pieces from their journey to influence my own path.”

The first Whakaterehia cohort is developing resources and guides to help build internal capability for working with Māori clients, as well as stimulating internal dialogues around Tikanga Māori at work. Increasing capability and cultural competence across the organisation allows ASB to better serve their customers and their unique needs.

ASB’s Whakaterehia programme not only increases ASB’s business credibility by better reflecting the communities in which they work, but also provides visible representation at senior levels to inspire others into leadership positions and attract more Māori talent into the bank.