

Pathway to Sustainability

Healthy, Safe & Productive Workplaces

Resource sheet

Creating healthy, safe and productive workplaces is a foundation for long-term business success. Workplace practices and culture play a role in attracting the best staff, retaining them, and bringing out the best in them once they're on board.



This resource sheet will help you explore options for creating and maintaining healthy, safe and productive workplaces for your business.

How can I create a healthy, safe and productive workplace?

The good news is that there are dozens of ways to create a work environment where your staff feel safe, valued and content. And in times like the present, where competition for talent is strong, it's a great thing on which to focus your

business' attention.

Good employment practices, such as flexible working hours, family-friendly policies, and access and support for professional development and training, are obvious starting points. For some employees, starting the workday later might mean the chance to pitch in with the kids in the morning. For others, working later some days so they can take off earlier for a standing appointment might make a disproportionate difference to their life satisfaction. Working from home every now and again might save members of your team from spending long periods of time fighting their way through traffic.

Flexible working hours, places, and/or the ability to negotiate for reduced working hours to meet other commitments, is becoming standard practice in the workplace. Generous leave entitlements, including maternity and paternity leave, as well as time for study or professional development, are also offered more and more frequently.

These entitlements stem from the realisation that it's not the number of hours your staff are present in the workplace that determines their contribution to your business, it's how motivated your staff are when they are there. And while human motivation might be a complex topic, it's clear that being healthy, feeling safe and feeling valued as a person (not just a worker!) are strong components.

Policy & Practice

It's one thing to create a policy for your workplace – whether for health and safety, work-life balance, and professional development – and another thing to consistently 'live out those policies' in practice. Indeed, creating a culture that supports the principles within the policies might be the most difficult – and valuable – challenge a business has for supporting its team!

Operating at a principles level, rather than detailed prescription level, may be the best place to start. Setting down principles, being clear about the intentions behind a given policy, and then allowing team members as much flexibility as is feasible to make it work for them are good starting points.

Developing a culture that enables and encourages policies to come to life, however, can be more art than science. Ensuring that team members' voices are heard when policies are created and feedback is sought on how they operate in practice is necessary to keep them pointed towards what they were intended to achieve. (Maybe just as crucial might be to drop or 'retire' policies that no longer serve their purpose.)

It's crucial to always strive towards creating an environment where team members are trusted, so that they can contribute their perspectives without fear of being slighted, ignored or disadvantaged. The best workplaces of all are FUN ones! You can seek out professional advice – for example, from [Capability Group](#) – on activities and attitudes that can foster an organisational culture conducive to productive, trusting workplaces.

Reference points

[Employment New Zealand](#) has more information on many of the topics noted above in its [Workplace Policies](#) section. Among other topics, you can find some great introductory resources on [work-life balance](#) and [employee performance](#) there.

[Worksafe](#) is the government body responsible for monitoring and improving workplace health and safety within NZ. It has recently released '[SafePlus](#)', a voluntary health and safety performance improvement toolkit.

[Diversity Works NZ](#) (formerly the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust) is a national membership organisation with a nationwide presence. Its mandate is to help NZ business develop more diverse and inclusive workplaces, and to [reap the rewards](#) of that diversity. It hosts the [Diversity Awards](#) annually and has a range of resources, including a collated [table of current diversity initiatives](#) within NZ businesses.

[Good4Work](#) is a free online workplace wellbeing tool, developed by a national group of health agencies. Organisations can rate their workplaces on the essential elements of a positive workplace culture and environment. This leads to strategies and a comprehensive range of resources to help take action.

Community involvement

As a business owner or manager, you are responsible for negotiating entitlements and expectations between the business and your team members. But you are also a broker between your team members and society. It is increasingly common for team members to be

given a day or two per year to contribute their skills and expertise – or even just their presence – in a way that benefits society.

Some businesses, such as BNZ, close branches nationwide on the same day (through their Closed for Good initiative). Others leave it up to individual teams to nominate a day (and activity). And others still let team members pursue a chosen activity on a day that suits them best.

Some examples of *social* activities are: running pro bono marketing or financial planning skills training, for example in the not for profit sector, or volunteering time for charities or community events. Some *environmental* activities are: beach clean-ups (e.g. with [Sustainable Coastlines](#)) and the ever-popular stream planting days (contact SBN’s own [Million Metres Streams](#) project for a ready-made fit!).

Ideally from a whole business perspective, these contributions to society are an opportunity to take a role in addressing or solving some of the problems that have relevance for your business – whether that’s *place-based* (e.g. financial literacy and school funding in your staff’s communities) or *theme-based* (e.g. cleaning up waterways that your business draws water from). Alternatively, you might place the emphasis on finding opportunities that fit with individual staff members’ skills and interests.

Be careful to manage expectations of all people involved – both in the community sector and your business. Everyone should understand the aims, objectives and the level of commitment involved.

If you choose to develop a formal plan, here’s the SBN policy for Community Involvement, which you can use as an example.

AIM:	To identify and participate in at least one practical community based activity each year
ACTION:	For example: staff will receive a paid day off to attend a riparian/tree planting session.
RECORD & REPORT:	This activity should be recorded using images and a brief story. Add a description of the event including location, participants, number of trees planted and photos.
PERSONAL COMMITMENT:	<i>For example:</i> this year I will attend a Sustainable Coastlines beach clean up as a health and safety volunteer.