



Australian Government

Equal Opportunity for
Women in the Workplace Agency

Media Release

Embargo : 2.15pm 8th November 2006

2006 EOWA BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Truly flexible workplace works for women

A company that gives employees total authority and flexibility to determine their working patterns and sets no limit on the amount of unpaid leave has won the *Minister's Award for Outstanding Initiative/Practice for Achieving Workplace Flexibility* at today's 2006 Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency's (EOWA) Business Achievement Awards.

Acumen Alliance, a business and IT consulting practice, has set a new benchmark for organisations aspiring to provide truly flexible workplaces with CEO and founding partner, Robert Kennedy, rejecting the current dichotomy that work and life are two separate concepts.

As a result, he has created a workplace where flexibility is available to everyone in the organisation from the receptionist to the CEO, and any changes to working patterns are pre-approved by the Executive. All staff are able to choose permanent full-time, part-time or contract arrangements and no consultant is assigned or expected to work in other states or countries.

For the first time since the EOWA Business Achievement Awards were introduced in 2001, the highly-contested *Leading CEO for the Advancement of Women Award* has been won by a female.

RSPCA Victoria's Maria Mercurio was picked by the judges from a pool of renowned leaders, that included the CEOs from HSBC Bank, Insurance Australia Group and Woodside Energy, for the culture she has implemented that is based on outcomes rather than the number of hours at the office, and for leading by example by keeping her working hours to a reasonable level and encouraging her managers to do the same.

As part of the organisation's first Enterprise Agreement negotiations she introduced what she considers to be mandatory conditions of employment, including paid maternity and paternity leave, personal leave, paid study leave and purchased leave.

VicSuper and IBM Australia were honoured as the *Leading Organisations for the Advancement of Women* (under 500 employees, and over 500 employees categories). Both organisations embrace diversity as a business imperative to attract and retain staff and are making positive inroads to attracting women into non-traditional roles.

Holding Redlich's Parenting Partner Program earned the organisation the *Outstanding Initiative/Result for the Advancement of Women award*. Devised and developed by a group of partners and championed by the National Managing Partner, the law firm appointed a Parenting Partner to meet with newly pregnant women to discuss topics such as childcare, returning to work, working from home and part-time work or job-sharing opportunities. The

Parenting Partner also acts as an advocate and negotiator within the partnership for flexible work practices across the organisation, as well as a mediator should any disputes arise.

Cummins Engine Company set targets to address the shortage of females in non-traditional roles and across the organisation generally, which included establishing a Women's Leadership Network Group,



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conducting an annual salary review that resulted in significant increases for female staff and increasing paid maternity leave entitlements. These initiatives won the company the *Outstanding EEO Practice for the Advancement of Women in a Non-Traditional Area/Role Award*.

EOWA also lauded one of the largest charitable providers of such elder care services in Australia. ECH was awarded the *Outstanding EEO Practice for the Advancement of Mature-Aged Women*. The organisation recognised that its registered and enrolled nurses employed in supervisory positions were previously trained in hands-on tasks related to caring for the elderly. As a result they introduced a front-line management program that focused on their role as leaders.

Niki Kesoglou from Westpac Banking Corporation was named the *Diversity Leader for the Advancement of Women* for her dedication and commitment to addressing issues for women in the workplace throughout her 11- year career at the bank. She was instrumental in devising and driving Westpac's child-care strategy, including creating the first Westpac Child Care Survey in 2004 and was the driving force behind creating a program that provides coaching for leaders to overcome biases and leverage the diversity within their teams.

The Director of EOWA, Anna McPhee, said, 'Businesses like Acumen Alliance and others acknowledged at today's awards, are re-writing the books when it comes to equal opportunity practice. It is my hope that other organisations will witness the business and social successes their innovation has achieved and be inspired to help create completely inclusive Australian workplaces.'

EOWA's 2006 Business Achievement Awards are sponsored by American Express Australia Limited, Australian Industry Group, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Exxon Mobil Australia Pty Ltd, Hays, IBM and McDonald's Australia.

A comprehensive media kit including profiles of all winners and details of media talent in winning organisations can found in the Media Centre at www.eowa.gov.au.

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