



Henry Davis York Case Study

Organisational Background

Henry Davis York (HDY) is one of Australia's oldest Sydney-based commercial law firms with 174 lawyers, 45 of whom are partners. During the last four years they have developed and implemented an extensive 'people focus' strategy that is linked to the goals and values of the firm. This strategy included a number of key initiatives that were designed to attract and retain talented staff, promote women and assist all staff to balance their work/life responsibilities. HDY has been recognised for its efforts, winning the 2004 HR Award in the Work/Life Category, the 2003 Employer of Choice *Australian Law Awards*, the 2003 Best Attraction & Retention Strategy Australian HR Award, and achieving Top Ranking in the 2006 national Work/Life Benchmarking conducted by Managing Work|Life Balance International.

QUICK FACTS

- **Industry Law**
- **Number of Employees** 350
- **Gender Split** 66% women and 34% men
- 14% of Partners are women and 86% are men; 80% of Special Counsel are women and 20% men. At Senior Associate level, 46% are Women and 54% are men.

Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment at HDY is merit-based and gender neutral, with the focus being on employing the best possible candidate for each position. An HR Professional is involved in interviewing all candidates and all have been trained in behavioural-based interview techniques, EEO standards and anti-discrimination legislation.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Some 4-5 years ago, the need to do more to attract talented/experienced employees and well qualified graduates became apparent. Competition between law firms was, and remains, intense and HDY needed not only to attract new recruits but also retain them and where appropriate, promote them within the firm. The HR team found that one of the key requirements of potential new recruits was the ability to work flexibly and for women and men to have equal access to promotional and development opportunities.

INITIATIVES

As part of HDY's overall 'people focus' strategy, the firm: -

- Consulted with staff through an in-depth work/life survey
- Analysed data on recruitment, promotion, transfer and return from maternity leave
- Reviewed and updated its policies, procedures and work practices

- Consulted with staff through exit interviews, induction follow-up meetings and practice- group retreats
- Advertised vacancies internally
- Used behavioural interviews plus testing tools for both recruitment, promotion and personal development processes.

HDY makes every attempt to ensure that new and current staff experience what was being sold during the recruitment process, both in terms of what opportunities there are within the firm and the type of work the employee will undertake.

RESULTS

- 30% of recruits come from internal referrals, making significant reductions in recruitment costs.
- 70% of new hires recruited in 2005-06 were women.
- 50% of all Senior Associate and Special Counsel positions were filled by women.

Work organisation

HDY has built a reputation not only for the quality and calibre of its work but also for the firm-wide attitude to flexible work arrangements. HDY has developed a unique culture on a basis of trust and mutual respect, where people are treated as individuals with unique circumstances and needs. This includes supporting people to maintain the right balance between their work and family responsibilities. Each request for a flexible work arrangement is considered on merit and the key decision-making criteria are whether the arrangement would be good for the individual, good for the firm and its client/s. If it is decided that the original request is not feasible, further discussions will take place to find a workable solution.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The firm identified the need to offer a range of flexible work arrangements for both men and women as a key strategy to attract and retain staff, assist staff returning from parental leave and to maintain and progress their careers within the firm.

INITIATIVES

The firm recognises that people's needs change during their lifecycle and employment with the organisation. HDY is therefore flexible in the way that any agreed arrangement is implemented. As examples of what is possible, they currently have a part-time lawyer who works 5 half days per week and a Special Counsel who works 4 days over a 5-day time-span.

HDY's philosophy of mutual responsibility drives the overall process of application and implementation of flexible work arrangements. One of the keys to the success of the flexible work arrangements has been the performance management aspect of all arrangements.

The firm provides:

- 12 weeks paid leave maternity leave after 2 years of service
- 1 week paid leave parental leave for men
- A Keeping In Touch program for women on maternity leave

- The opportunity for staff to have a computer set up at home
- Invitations to staff on parental leave to all functions and education programs
- A room set up to accommodate nursing mothers.

In addition, HDY provides:

- A Child-Care information kit for all staff expecting or caring for a child
- Flexible work options available to staff returning from maternity leave
- Assistance with arranging child-care to enable staff with child care responsibilities to attend weekend learning and development retreats
- An employee MBF Health Plan
- External counselling and employee assistance
- Weekly yoga and Pilates classes
- Annual flu vaccinations

RESULTS

- There has been a 100% return from maternity leave, 70% of whom are employed in administrative and support roles.
- Currently, there are 52 female employees working in a part-time capacity, with 20 of these employees working in job-share positions.
- A Senior Associate returned to work after maternity leave on a part-time, part-day basis (3 mornings per week).

Other Notable Strategies

Women's Networking Lunches. To achieve greater gender balance at senior levels within the firm, it was recognised that female role models needed to be more visible. To address this, HDY implemented a series of informal networking lunches specifically for their female staff. These lunches were hosted by their female partners with the purpose of:

- Providing a networking forum for the firm's female lawyers and for their female partners to share the history behind their career progression;
- Assisting in retaining their talented women by discussing issues relating to work /life balance, flexible work practices and how to make flexibility work in practice; and
- Generally supporting the development and progression of their female staff.

While this initiative was available solely to female staff, the intention was not to isolate male staff or to treat one group differently from the other. Rather, it was an acknowledgement that female staff did not have the same access to role models as their male counterparts and have, or will potentially have, different issues to address during the development of their careers.

The lunches were run over a two month period with a total of 77 female solicitors attending. The positive feedback received from attendees showed that it is often the small initiatives such as this that have the greatest impact.

QUOTES

Below are some comments from attendees at the Women's Networking Lunches:

"Lunch was a great way to meet some of the other female lawyers working in other practice groups. Hearing others' experiences and thoughts on career development and work/life balance was insightful and helped me think about my career aspirations."

"I'm very happy that HDY has taken this initiative. It makes me feel more valued and also comforted in knowing that other female lawyers feel the same way."

"I really enjoyed the lunch and found it extremely worthwhile hearing the experiences of other female lawyers. As a junior, I think it is especially important to learn from them."