

## What they're saying at employment conferences

As part of the National Conversation about Work, Dave Stewart from Human Value , Business Consulting & HR Services has been asking participants at a number of national conferences: "What would make a difference for you to achieve equality and fairness at work ?"

Here's what they said:

### Occupational Safety and Health Master-class Conference

- "We just want more money"
- "Government needs to support working families more."
- "We haven't had kids yet but are thinking about it. The biggest issue for us is finance and how we're going to manage spending time with our child like we want to, but with only one wage coming in" (male participant).
- "I used to end up losing \$60 a week by the time I paid child care – but I had to work to get ahead. It was my choice at the time so I put up with it. People shouldn't have to make that choice."
- "The lack of family support impacts on the community as well. The school is always crying out for parents to help with events, but most have both parents working or are single parent so can't help out. Lots of school events get cancelled because of lack of parental help."
- "In the health sector it is so hard to recruit migrant nurses. We desperately need nurses and medical staff but can't get them because of the self serving barriers some professional organisations put in place. This puts lots of pressure and stress on existing staff."
- "Government needs to look at HSE policy and provide better resources through ACC or DOL, or even a merged body. Those agencies also need better standards for their employees. The services and auditing they apply are confused and over lap."
- "Sometimes the (HSE) inspectors are so green they know less than we do. There seems to be very few experienced HSE inspectors and the new ones are just taken on without full training. This means the private sector of OSH in house people have to pick up the slack"

- “OSH compliance can be complicated and costly.”
- “in this market we’re hearing lots about the economy but not much about HSE. Valuing people and acting safely needs to be reinforced to help companies be successful in a tight market – the benefits of supporting staff vs. the cost of accidents when cutting staff/corners.”
- “Contractors and sub contractors can be a real HSE issue for companies. The employment relationship gets mixed and confused. It needs clearing up. It would be good to have the process and relationship defined better.”
- “Smaller companies should be made to join ACC accreditation programmes. At the moment they just show ‘recently downloaded policies’ that bear little resemblance to practice – they should be made to show that they are complying and the cost of non compliance put back and credited against large employer levies – those that are doing everything right”
- “Ageing workforce is a big issue for us, not right now but within the next 5 – 10 years. There aren’t enough apprentices coming through. Government should promote better training incentives. Currently its too hard for employers to take on apprentices so they don’t – and we all lose out.”
- “Unions are out of touch. We wanted to provide incentives for our employees and the union wouldn’t allow us to do it, arguing that we should pay long service leave. We said their members wanted money this year not in 3 years and they should talk to their members – yet they stick to their stance. And they only have 30% membership yet dominate and want to be involved in everything, but are a real barrier to things moving forward.”
- “Parental leave could be better, more money for longer periods. Currently some women get forced back to work by circumstances.”
- “enable more training and re-training so people can change careers as they age.”
- “We’re seeing lots of offshoring (I.e. F & P). The jobs should stay in NZ. Government should create incentives to hold real jobs here and to

prevent taking jobs off shore. If not incentives then something to help reduce costs.”

- “As a small employer I struggle to train staff and to do research to allow business growth. Government could help SME employers with training incentives and lots more advice readily available. For example better HSE policy advice, legal information and standard templates allowing SME employers to do the right thing without constantly having to hire in specialists.”
- “Government should help train those migrants that we encouraged to come here then made it difficult for them to work in their chosen field. (make it easier)”
- “There are real literacy and numeracy issues out there that need to be addressed. Its not just in unskilled and minimum wage workers either. Some people are good at hiding their literacy and the current climate of ‘everyone passes every test in school’ doesn’t help. We don’t get a true picture of people’s abilities until it’s too late “
- “Shift work needs to be looked at and how to make it easier to balance shifts with personal and business needs so that staff are valued, do good work and get time with their families.”
- “I am a volunteer fireman. The whole crucial volunteer sector is really under threat. Whether its firemen, ambulance or whatever. The strain can be huge for employers who are supposed to support the staff members’ absences with time and money when they are away. Most employers can’t afford it and this can mean financial strain on the volunteers.... The whole thing could collapse.”

#### Rostering and Shiftwork Conference

- “Rosters can be hard. Our staff work 7 days on 7 days off. It’s hard to manage their leave accrued and in our market to lower their outstanding leave balances. We can’t replace them on the shift so their leave goes up and up.”
- “We’d like to be more flexible with our shifts and rosters (i.e stagger start

times) but staff and unions are reluctant to change the current work or acknowledge that a change could be a win/win”

- “We want to be more flexible to meet business needs as well as be fair to our staff. But by the time we go through a process the (business) needs have changed and we get rigid agreements. It’s hard to be receptive to change when there’s so much resistance and process.”
- “We find shift workers socialise together; colleagues are friends. This means that they party together and are ‘ill’ together and no one turns up for the next shift.”
- Government should clarify what a ‘normal’ day is in the Holidays Act. Our staff work is a combination of 8 & 12 hours shifts and everyone’s confused about how much sick or annual leave they get. Is a 12 hour shift one day or 1.5? We even get different answers from legal and government people we ask. It’s confusing.”
- “We have lots of staff from different countries who have worked under different conditions. They tell us we need more light, or less heat. Some have even threatened to go home when they say it’s too hot. Is there a place we can go to get information about work conditions? It would make it easier for employers.”
- “Clarify and simplify the Holidays Act. For example what do we pay a person who is called in on their day off, or if it’s a Saturday or a Statutory day? The Act can be very vague”
- “Shift workers have a hard time with childcare. Would be great to be able to respond to their childcare needs. What is Government doing to help?”
- “Government should have tax incentives or breaks so companies can look at childcare, literacy programmes and flexible work assistance. There should be incentives for this - they should lead.”
- “We need a decent determination of what a casual is and what they are entitled to.”

## Executive Assistant and Personal Assistant Conference

- “I would like to work 4 days a week but don’t think my boss is ready for the conversation. I don’t have children, it’s just a lifestyle choice after 25 years working. I don’t fit under the Flexible Working Act.”
- “My employer supports children in the workplace, flexibility re feeding, childcare and lots of other benefits for mothers. They have a programme to bring back mothers and allow flexibility around work and study – more employers should do the same.”
- “I’d like to see my pay reflect the value I provide. My role is very senior as a PA but because I don’t have staff reporting to me I have hit a pay scale ‘glass ceiling’ when compared to other jobs which isn’t fair.”
- “Fair pay is a big issue for places like old people’s homes. Care staff get crap wages for the work they do.”
- The flexible work legislation is great for people with children, but what about those people without. We end up supporting benefits for others without being able to get them ourselves. It’s not fair.”
- “I’d like to see more flexibility. Not just around taking some time off or starting early/late, but more flexible flexibility....being able to work when the work is there and not when it isn’t or around lots of different life schedules not just those that fall neatly into boxes.”
- “It’s hard working in a place where we have high powered woman managers without children. They seem to take on the ‘masculine’ traits and it makes it hard to be seen as equal when asking for time off to care for children.”
- “One of my staff is a male whose wife has a high paying powerful job. He takes on all the responsibilities of sick children and family appointments. It’s interesting that this was noted in his file – it wouldn’t have been if he was a she.”
- My company (Education sector) can be a bit too EEO sometimes. Last year we had a staff member applying for a job they were already doing on secondment. The whole process was so drawn out because of EEO policies. It seemed so unfair to put a person who was already doing a great job though such a rigmarole of applying for the job, been grilled at

interview and then being made to feel grateful when she succeeded. It's HR gone mad!"

- "We work for good companies and are happy with how we are treated – but yes, it is because we work for the bosses and we have a good relationship – it isn't always the same for every position or person."
- "More flexibility about work hours (i.e. 4 x 10hr days and one day off would be great. Alternatively 1 day off a month. This would give me more time to assist elderly parents and take care of nephews."
- "The ability to carry out core tasks from home when appropriate/applicable. My toddler goes to childcare 45 hours per week, I am able to reduce this if I can do some work from/at home."
- "HR should be reactive to feedback, not just listen and do nothing."
- "More productive union negotiations would be helpful."
- "I took a lifestyle choice and stepped down to a different job. Half the salary and five times less aggravation. Best thing I ever did! It was a risk and a punt but I haven't looked back."
- "Importance of work reflected in remuneration"
- "Time allocated to training once a week or twice a week to complete degree"
- "Ability to work from home at short notice if I have a sick child"
- "Tax deductible childcare would help"
- "Pay to reflect the value provided"
- "More after school care so my husband can return to work"
- "More time to take leave, and not worry about when I have to take it when the boss is away"
- "Not having to listen to references about the previous person and how they did the job and their abilities"
- "Administration pay band to be on same scale as Advisors etc"
- "More Te Reo and Tikanga awareness"
- "Pay equity given EA may have more university qualifications than policy analysts"
- "Positive discrimination to achieve gender balance in staffing levels"

“Our company hires lots of new migrants so I know lots of other people like me who have studied in NZ and struggled to find work. A number of us have just taken voluntary redundancy or been made redundant so we’re back out there looking. It’s gotten just as hard as when I first finished my studies. I’ve been told to change my name to a more European name and to try and ‘play down’ my background. I’m lucky though at least I have some relevant experience with my degree (marketing). I may go back and study more, that’s what a number of recruitment companies have suggested.

I have a friend who is Indonesian. She was lucky and got a special skilled migrant visa straight from study because she studied accounting. But she couldn’t get any other job than in a security booth. Now her visa is up and she has been told that she is not working in her ‘skilled’ area so won’t get it renewed. It’s so unfair. NZ tells migrants they are skilled and needed and then no jobs are available for us. My choices are limited. I guess it’s either study or go back home.”