



## Entry for NZ Post People Management Award: Auckland City Careers Café

### Vision and strategic direction

Working for Auckland City council means being part of an organisation that understands what people need from their city, today and in the future. Our community vision is to be the First City of the Pacific, which means that as an organisation we need to work together, to ensure that 'Auckland becomes a sophisticated, growing and vibrant international city with a soul'.

Auckland City delivers over 1,000 services to the community, and has over 1800 employees, in 29 business groups, in 35 locations around Auckland Isthmus and Islands. Our organisations diversity presents the biggest challenge in meeting the community vision and places greater importance on our need to work together as 'one organisation'. To work as one organisation we need to be committed to our four service characteristics, these are innovative, knowledgeable, responsible and accessible.

We believe that our employees are our most important asset. Therefore, our people-focused strategic direction is to have 'talented people who want to work here and form motivated and valued teams'. One strategic objectives developed from this direction is 'to attract and retain motivated and talented people'. The internal career development expo was an initiative designed to achieve this objective.

The need for an internal career development expo was established because of two clear indicators. Firstly, recent research carried out on our recruitment practices clearly supported the need to "grow our own". The research found stated that there is a need to facilitate internal candidate movements to retain knowledge and skills within Auckland City and recommended that more effort and communication is required to promote (internally and externally) the opportunities available at Auckland City. Secondly, the 2003 and 2004 climate survey results indicated that employees felt they were not aware of career opportunities or a path for career progression within the organisation. In 2004 only 38.7% of employees agreed that there was a career path, which was one of the lowest rated statements in the survey. In contrast the 2004 'unlimited best places to work survey', found that the number one key driver amongst the highest ranking companies was that employees feel there is a future for them in their organisation.

These two key indicators highlighted the need to take action by showing our people the wealth of opportunity in such a diverse organisation such as ours.

The expected benefits of the career development expo included the following;

- increased awareness of career development options
- empower employees to consider their own career development
- greater understanding of the organisation
- greater understanding of the function, roles and projects in each business group
- employees will be able to meet contacts and build informal networks
- improved retention of key skills and knowledge
- building our internal recruitment brand through engaging employees
- medium term improved results in the staff climate survey in relation to career opportunities within Auckland City
- long term reduced external recruitment and temporary staff costs as more roles may be able to filled by internal candidates or people attracted to us through the expos

### Event description

The internal career development expo was held in May 2005. The expo was branded the 'careers cafe' and held over two half-days to showcase the variety of career options for current employees of Auckland City.

Twenty-seven business groups within the organisation participated in the careers cafe, exhibiting information and providing representatives to talk about the role of the group and the variety of careers available, and the skills and experience needed to progress in those careers. Approximately 700 employees attended ranging in seniority from directors to parking wardens, and coming from locations as far away as Waiheke and Otahuhu. The mayor of Auckland City, Dick Hubbard also attended the expo.

The careers cafe was held in the town hall, which is an Auckland City venue. A cross-organisational project team was established to plan, organise and manage the event. Each business group was provided with a booth, banners and handouts that were created by the project team. The information on the banners and handouts assisted in explaining the group's function, structure, key projects and achievements, as well as profiling potential career development opportunities and key roles to attendees. The profiles described successful employees with the emphasis on their career path, what they love about their role, key challenges they face and the skills and experience they needed to progress to that role. Attendees were able to take away information on business groups, key roles, and career planning. Each business group provided representatives at the booths to act as ambassadors and to answer any questions.

The expo focused on career development opportunities including project teams, permanent positions and secondments. It highlighted transferable skills people may have and enabled people to create a plan in order to grow their career within Auckland City.

The University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology also participated to promote courses of study that would support people in realising their career aspirations.

### **Project management techniques**

The project manager applied the Kepner Tregoe project management methodology. This is made up of three phases, definition, planning and implementation. The project management of this event was a key factor in its success. The definition phase consisted of development of the project statement and objectives, work break down structure and identifying resource requirements. The planning phase involved assigning responsibility to key individuals, sequencing and scheduling deliverables, scheduling resources, risk and opportunity analysis. The majority of these two phases was completed before project approval was received from the executive team. Project signoff was received one month prior to the event being held, and without the completion of the first two phases the event would not have been delivered on time within budget.

The project team was made up of three members of human resources, an external communications expert, an internal event organiser and a business administration person who was identified as having influence over key stakeholders. The team meet weekly and had set agendas, task lists and minutes. In addition to weekly meetings, five separate planning sessions occurred before the event. A running budget was kept and finalised after the event.

The last phase in the management of this project was implementation, where we ran the event, monitored progress and modified the project plan as needed. Individual areas of responsibility during the event were set; this included briefing representatives, floor control, music, catering, prizes, and health and safety. After the event we closed out and evaluated and made recommendations for next year.

The bulk of the work was developing the theme, collating information and generating all the display material for the event. All material had to be signed off by each group manager to ensure accuracy of data.

The budget was set at \$25,000, the total amount spent was \$23,000, creating a \$2000 under-spend. Significant savings were achieved through using our networks, for example contents of the "goodie bags" that people got on arrival were sourced through personal contacts and promotional organisations. We used in-house printing and design, an Auckland City venue and in house catering, as well as an internal event organiser. See *appendix for supporting information*.

### **Communication and creating buy-in from stakeholders**

This was one of the most challenging aspects of the project as this was a new event, so people did not know what to expect.

Communication channels included:

- memorandums from human resources group manager to other group managers to raise awareness and ask for their support – it had to come from the top down
- an invitation to each staff member, attached to their payslip

- working with communications and marketing staff to develop articles and information for *Citywire*, the organisation's weekly e-newsletter
- dedicating one project member to making contact with group managers, staff providing information for role profiles, and group booth representatives
- HR advisers promoting the expo within their groups at meetings and in one-on-one talks
- Red Bull promotional staff delivering product and reminding staff about careers cafe
- cross organisation project team that each had contact with large groups within council
- personal invitation to Auckland City's mayor, who came to the expo on the first day
- word of mouth promotion after day one was evidenced by a larger number of attendees on day two
- hit rates on the articles published on our intranet "Citynet" were reported as 712 in the week before the event and 766 in the week of the event. *See appendix for communications timeline*

In order to create buy-in for this event it was important to raise the profile and get support from senior management. Profiling individuals in the printed material displayed in the booths meant that they had an instant involvement in the project. The human resource advisers (8) work in an account management style and were responsible for briefing and influencing assigned business groups. Personalising the communications was a successful factor in creating buy-in for the event. It was important to get buy-in from booth representative and this was achieved through a briefing and information sheet provided before the event. The impact of this was that groups took ownership of their booths, turning up on the day with additional material and props. Each group demonstrated a large amount of pride in what they do and their key achievements and decorated their booth accordingly. This feeling created an atmosphere of energy and excitement and played a significant role in creating support and buy in from the attendees.

It was one of the project objectives to run a professional looking event with minimal workload for the business groups. The support for this event was demonstrated by the high level of attendance, the number of senior managers that made the time to attend, act as group ambassadors and roster staff to attend even during peak business. Examples of level of interest included the call centre which co-ordinated a roster, accounts payable who attended as whole teams, and the regulatory team from Waiheke island made the journey together.

### **Innovation and originality**

Our research indicated that no other organisation in New Zealand has run an internal careers expo. After discussing our project with staff at the two universities that we wanted to participate, they congratulated us on such an innovative project, as they had not heard of any organisations doing this. They agreed that we were taking an unchartered, proactive approach to getting employees to think about their career options, stay within the organisation and learn about other parts of the organisation. Feedback from the recent regional local government HR forum was that this event was unprecedented.

We feel that the project was an innovative solution to a common business need and gave far more benefit than we had initially expected. We used innovative techniques to achieve our project objectives under budget and on time, this included sourcing equipment, venue, prizes and giveaways through networks.

The theme and design of the expo was original and innovative. The design was based on the café/coffee theme and incorporated a warm red colour and a coffee swirl (see appendix for example). It was designed to look professional yet relaxed and inviting, and attract as many attendees as possible. The theme was reflected through the entire expo from the invitations, to the giveaways and final prize. In order to ensure people actually spoke to the booth representatives about careers and the role of the group, an innovative solution was developed where people were issued with "coffee cards". They collected a stamp when they spoke to a booth-holder and once their card was full (six stamps), on the way out of the careers cafe they could collect a free coffee, complete the coffee card with their details and enter it into a prize draw. This allowed us to track how many people attended and which groups they were from, as well as send a follow-up survey to all attendees. The coffee cards proved to be a very successful tool in facilitating attendee discussions as well as reinforcing the theme.

The material was original and innovative and was designed with the intention of being reused at other expos. Careful planning also meant that the banners are large enough to be read by the visually impaired, we profiled people who were recent migrants, graduates, females in management roles, and people of different ethnicities so that the material is transferable to any audience at any future expo. The role profiles featured details about real people in real roles and individual photos were added to generate interest. Attendee could then also put a face to a name, which encourages a 'one organisation' feel.

The project team designed handouts ("What do I do now?" see appendix for example) for attendees, and these were placed in the goody bags. These described the steps attendees should take to develop their career within

Auckland City and asked a number of questions to initiate self-reflection. We wanted to ensure that this wasn't an exciting experience for employees that lead to nothing. This handout tied into our organisational performance development process, which has a section for development planning. There was a stand at the café dedicated to offering career-planning advice using this tool.

### Successful results – non financial

The success of this event far exceeded our expectations. Around 700 people attended – one-third of the organisation. Considering the geographical spread of the organisation and the fact that many employees are satisfied in their current role, we believe this was an excellent turnout. This is the only event for the last 18 months, which included the whole organisation, and encouraged one organisation interaction.

The benefits from this event are ongoing and we expect that they will grow with time. Some results have been measured using an electronic survey, the feedback was extremely positive; the following figures are based of the responses of 190 attendees.

- 86% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they learnt more about other roles in Auckland City. The result was increased awareness of career development options. We have had more internal applications for vacancies a result of the event
- 97% agreed or strongly agreed that the careers cafe allowed them to learn more about other groups in Auckland City. The outcome was that attendees developed a greater understanding of the purpose, roles and projects within each business group. Subsequently developing greater understand of the overall organisation.
- 91% of attendees gave the event a high or very high overall rating of the event. *'I wanted to express my thoughts towards this fantastic event, which your department has run. I think it has been absolutely worthwhile. I found it extremely interesting, after being here for almost 19 years, there is still loads I learnt after going around the booths! The profiles on each group and key individuals were also great. Congratulations on a successful venture, I look forward to supporting the next café". Staff feedback*
- 85% agreed or strongly agreed that going to the careers café was a good use of their time. *"I went over to your Careers cafe and I must say I thought it was most professionally done and there seems to be high level of interest in those attending. Congratulations". Feedback from Director*
- The event contributed value to the attendees through facilitating interactions with each other. The verbatim comments were; that the careers café was beneficial for attendees for putting faces to names and building relationships and networking with other groups to improve business processes. Feedback from booth holders has been that many groups have resolved a of business issues, promoted their services and improved business efficiencies because of the careers cafe.
- The demonstration of group pride and atmosphere at the event, plus the ongoing buzz in the business after the event. The result was the event engaged employees and assisted in building our internal recruitment brand.
- Approximately 700 "what do I do now handouts" were distributed, increasing available career planning information and encouraged employees to develop their own career and reach their full potential.
- The banners and materials have been designed and produced so that they can be used for future expos and recruitment drives.
- Lastly, the success of this event was recognised across the organisation, the project team received the chief executive award for demonstrating the service characteristics award.

Other unexpected benefits that were realised from this event were as follows;

- Drake, our temp supplier are now using group and role information produced for the event for the induction of temp staff at Auckland City
- We are now using information on groups and roles for international/regular recruitment programme
- The information on purpose of groups and key roles has been incorporated into our 'first start' employee induction programmes.
- Discussion among employees and a 'one organisation' feel

Results that we expect to see in the medium term

- Reduced turnover, increased placement of internal candidates and ultimately improved retention of key skills and knowledge.
- Improved results in the staff climate survey in relation to career opportunities within Auckland City

The careers cafe was initially planned as a one-off event, however a high demand for it to be an annual event has meant that this decision has had to be reviewed. *To review comments see the appendix*

## **Successful results - financial**

It is difficult at this stage to measure the financial benefits of the career café, but we are confident that we will see these grow over time. Benefits that we can confirm are as follows;

- Some groups advertised vacancies at the careers café and have subsequently been able to fill the positions internally, this has saved recruitment costs and down time. .
- We expect long term reduced external recruitment and temporary staff costs, as more roles may be able to filled by internal candidates or people attracted to work for us through the expo.
- Our HR metrics show that our cost of recruitment is approximately 60% of one person's salary, therefore the retention as a result of the careers café of one employee on a salary of \$35K would pay back the entire budget of the event.

## **Summary and conclusion**

From the feedback/awards we have received and the benefits that groups have reported, this event was highly successful in enhancing our organisations working environment.

The café assisted attendees in making informal networks, understanding the functions of other groups and the wider organisation. This knowledge will benefit Auckland City by enabling employees to achieve strategic objectives and the community vision. The career development information provided will also assist employees in selecting smart career options within the organisation and ultimately develop themselves to their full potential while remaining in our employment.

Holding an internal career development expo was the right thing to do because there was a need for encouraging career development within the organisation; this was evident through the staff climate survey results and in the medium term will address these results. The project team acted responsibly and ran the event in house and used in house suppliers and resources to minimise the cost to the rate payer.

Research shows that the recruitment brand of local government is not attractive to external candidates. Before commencing recruitment branding exercise Auckland City it is important to strengthen our employment brand to be an employer of choice in order to retain employees. Holding a career development expo was the right thing to do to strengthen Auckland City's brand, as it is important to have engaged employees to promote the organisation to potential new employees. We value our employees and want them to have a successful career within the organisation.

In the current tight labour market, where organisations in the private sector can offer higher remuneration than local government, it is essential for the organisation to grow its own talent in order to achieve organisational goals. The careers cafe was the right thing to do to promote career options that our existing talent pool can access.