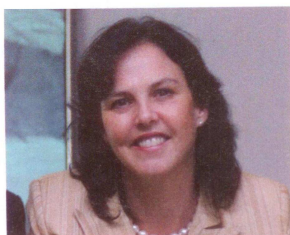


Real life stories: Change and keeping staff on board

Change is inevitable in any kind of business. If you're going to be competitive, you need to be able to adapt your business to the twists and turns of the marketplace. **Luke Telford** asks two business owners how they're managing significant change in their companies.

Walking the talk

Who: Kathryn MacMillan, managing director
Company: Nine2Three Employment Solutions
nine2three.com.au
Years in business: Seven



Nine2Three Employment Solutions is a boutique recruitment and employment company specialising in flexible workplace practices and the

placement of women returning to the workforce, predominantly into accounting and office administration roles. We pride ourselves on being highly professional.

We knew if we were going to promote flexibility at work to our clients, we would have to prove that the system worked. We set about ensuring that Nine2Three is a totally flexible workplace, where our employees choose their hours of work and we offer a culture of supporting our employees to manage their work-life balance. The result of this change was immediately noticeable. In an industry where staff attrition rates run at 30%, Nine2Three has had zero staff turnover for the past three years.

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) meant we needed to implement strong change to our business model. We needed to ensure that we could navigate

the economic climate and keep our staff employed. We needed to reduce our costs and requested staff to reduce hours of work. This was a significant change to the business, and the management and staff had to adapt. It has been suggested that 50% of our industry did not survive the GFC, however we were able to steer through the difficult times and keep our most valuable resource - our staff - intact.

Asking staff to reduce hours in a difficult economy is not an easy thing. We used clear communication to employees, both individually and as a team, to ensure they were not left in the dark as to what was going on, and to see the reasons behind the hard decisions. Getting our team members on board, committed and connected to our business was, and remains, our number one priority.

To implement flexibility and offer part-time work at Nine2Three, we had to develop systems and resources that would make our service seamless. Looking at the overall workflows, we needed to design systems that would ensure that client requests are managed, with all team members being fully informed at all stages. This involved the use of technology and setting up communication procedures and processes.

New technology can be frightening for team members if they are not on board with the total concept from the beginning. It was very important for us to communicate to them the reasons we wished to change our processes and the positives that would come from change.

Offering training in any new technology or work duty helped us to minimise any negativity surrounding the changes.

We keep our staff motivated in times of change by communicating effectively with each and every employee. We make our team members feel that their input and ideas are valued and that they are an integral part of Nine2Three. Addressing any concerns raised and giving our employees a forum to speak out about any concerns was also really important. Communication is the key to great workplaces and managing change.

I think one of the greatest strengths of small business is our ability to be light on the ground and nimble with regard to change. We can move quickly in response to business conditions and take opportunities as soon as we see them. It is important for small business owners to recognise this and look for opportunities to grow and change at all times.