
Live to work or work to live....

Monday 31 July 2006: The challenge for organisations to ensure work-life balance for staff is not an easy one. Many find it difficult to develop and implement workplace policies that allow flexibility and assist in achieving results to meet and exceed company expectations. However, having the right strategy and framework in place and being committed to this strategy is a big step in the right direction.

At Vero Insurance Limited (Vero), the human resources team has created a framework that supports organisational objectives while providing benefits and flexibility for employees.

In 2005, as part of the overall HR Strategy, a dedicated team was set up to review and refine the Vero Certified Agreement (CA).

Ellis Hurley, Executive General Manager, Corporate Services at Vero said, "We believe that a flexible and realistic approach is required when striving to achieve work-life balance for staff. The Vero CA allows us to provide the opportunity for employees to negotiate flexible working arrangements to suit their needs."

"The CA is reviewed every three years and updated to reflect surrounding lifestyle changes, and of course, changes in the workplace itself," Ms Hurley said.

Flexible working arrangements such as provisions for gradual retirement, job sharing and working from home were some of the expanded options from the previous CA.

Not only is it important that an organisation offers flexibility, it also has to be seen as making a valid contribution to the community.

As part of Vero's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy and the launch of a workplace giving program, Verogive, in November 2005 a community leave option was also introduced. The policy provides for one day's paid leave each year for employees to volunteer with a Vero charity or another charitable organisation where relevant. It recognises the varied interests and responsibilities of Vero employees and provides an opportunity to give back to the community.

At the same time, Vero Balance Leave was introduced to put a structure around recognition of personal contributions. Managers can grant up to two days paid leave per calendar year for employees who sacrifice personal time to meet business needs.

Another amended clause was the option to take a 12 month career break which can be taken after three years service. It is unpaid, but employees can return to their original position or a comparable role.

There are also personal leave provisions including sick, carers and emergency leave. Compassionate leave has also been extended to five days. And in line with ensuring that Vero employees have greater flexibility, they have the option to 'purchase' additional leave.

And it doesn't end there. To enhance the CA, policies are also introduced and implemented. For example, Vero employees are also entitled to take paid leave as part of the Vero Study Support policy.

"At Vero we are committed to a process of continuous improvement and are now completing policies and procedures to complement the new CA and further operationalise the new options", said Ms Hurley.

Editor's note

Vero Insurance Limited ("Vero") is a subsidiary of the Promina Group Limited, which is one of the top 50 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. Vero, formerly Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Australia Limited, has for many years been offering highly specialised solutions to its large range of customers.

Vero is one of Australia's largest intermediated general insurance companies and has 19 branches across Australia, providing a suite of quality specialised risk management products and services through brokers, corporate partners and risk managers.

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