

# Congratulations Webb Ross

Respect and flexibility brings Northland  
firm home as Employer of Choice **By Amy Mansfield**

**One of the voters for winning firm Webb Ross in the Legal Personnel Employer of Choice Award, eligibility for which is restricted to employees, said of the Whangarei-based firm: "[It is] an employer that best promotes the growth and development of all who work there through its workplace culture and leadership, and that demonstrates to its employees that they are vital members of its team."**

Stuart Spicer, partner at Webb Ross, himself exhibited these qualities when he came to the stage to accept the Award at the New Zealand Law Awards 2007 ceremony, saying, "I feel we've been judged by the people who could've been our harshest critics, yet are our wealthiest resource". He also acknowledged the firm's office manager Mary Armstrong, who has been with the firm for around 20 years, its HR consultant Anne Kaminski, who has only recently come on board, but with noticeable results, and independent

consultant Irene Joyce, all of whom he says have been very involved in the firm's success with its employees.

So, what exactly is the firm doing for its staff? Spicer says the firm's culture is to promote independence in the staff and provide flexibility. "We're very open to flexible working hours." The firm provides staff with laptops to enable them to work from home, for example, and one current employee is even working from Australia for an extended period.

A while back, to demonstrate to the employees it values their opinions, the firm had all the partners reviewed by the staff, who in frankness found some of them wanting. "Some of the partners had to change their behaviour – for the better, of course."

The firm has since adopted a wellness programme, which includes making physical checks available for all staff, and has also implemented a mentoring programme.

In response to a comment cited from one employee that the firm's employees are shown "a strong degree of trust", Spicer says, "We're very keen on delegation with responsibility. We have a transparent programme which enables staff to assess their competencies, and we give people work to the full extent of their abilities."

In one sense, Spicer acknowledges, the provision of all these 'benefits' is for the purely selfish goal of staff recruitment and retention. "For the provincial firms, getting legal staff is always a challenge," he says, and the firm hopes winning the Employer of Choice Award will help fill the vacancies it is currently advertising on its website.

Looking ahead, Spicer says the firm is going to do "much more of the same". While employers can usefully encourage sports teams and the like for their teams to get involved in, he says the area in which Webb Ross has found employees most appreciate support is that of coaching and mentoring. "Frankly, we're learning that there's so much more you can do all the time".

Hear, hear, Webb Ross!

"The standout feature of the firm is the strong degree of trust shown to employees, which is probably the most important thing the partners can do for that relationship. It's a mature relationship when occasional lapses by individuals do not reduce the trust shown in employees generally."

"Other places I have worked for seem lousy compared to this firm. This is by far the best place to work and would be ideal to showcase for training other businesses."

**Legal Personnel – proud to support Employers of Choice!**

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