



## **Comvita's Workplace Work and Life Award Nomination**

### **1. Organisation Overview**

Comvita enjoys a reputation as a premium global natural health brand and is committed to the development of innovative natural health and wellbeing products backed by credible scientific research. With a proud 30-year heritage in therapeutic bee-based products, Comvita is the world's largest manufacturer and marketer of Manuka (*Leptospermum*) honey, however in more recent times the Company has developed its range of ingredient platforms, unique IP and products that meet global consumer preferences in natural health. Comvita offers products in the categories of Woundcare, Healthcare, Skincare and Functional Foods. The Company manufactures in New Zealand and sells its products in over 20 countries with offices in New Zealand, Hong Kong, Australia, Japan, Taiwan and the UK.

The company has grown considerably since 1974 when it was founded by Bee Keeper Claude Stratford; however the rate of growth has accelerated substantially over the last three years. Organic growth and business acquisitions have raised staff totals from 100 in 2005 to 256 worldwide in 2008. Comvita now has offices in Australia, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, with the head office in Paengaroa (Bay of Plenty). There are currently 115 New Zealand employees involved in the following areas: Research and Development, Quality, Production, Distribution, Sales and Marketing, Finance and Administration. Comvita is party to a Collective Employment Agreement with the Maritime Union of NZ, with five union members being covered by this CEA. Employees range in age from 19 to 62 years old, with 74% of the workforce being women and 26% being men.

Claude's vision was to produce natural products, primarily derived from bee products that improve the community's health. At 97 years of age Claude continues to be an inspiration and the company's vision has changed very little over time. Comvita now has a global reputation for premium healthcare products,

In New Zealand Comvita has employees from a vast range of nationalities, including Maori, Pacific Islands, Belgium, South Africa, Iraq, China, England, Kiribati, Turkey and Germany.

During the last year Comvita held brand values workshops to consult with staff on how they feel about their employer and how they see their company progressing in the future. It was heartening to see that the majority of staff members were in alignment on the most important values for Comvita – Passion, Respect and New Perspectives.

#### ***Passion***

We are passionate about the quality and effectiveness of the products we make. We believe that nature holds the key to a better quality of life.

#### ***Respect***

We care for the future of people and nature. We apply integrity and sustainable principles in everything we do.

#### ***New Perspectives***

We aim to change perceptions of natural health by applying science and innovation. Our New Zealand origin and culture drive new thinking.



## 2. Supporting Comvita employees' work-life balance in practice

### EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

**Flexible hours;** work from home options are available to all office staff, which includes contributions to broadband connections, home office set-ups and teleconferencing; (more detail provided in point 5). Approximately 20% of employees currently work from home on a regular basis (this includes full time and part time staff), with others occasionally using this option.

**Volunteer Leave Day – “Helping Hands”;** permanent full time and part time staff at Comvita are entitled to a paid day's leave per year, helping an organisation of their choice. Comvita realizes that by providing an opportunity for their staff to contribute time, to a passion is valuable in a society where there is little 'free' time. Volunteers must submit an application with details of their 'day out' and provide a feedback report on completion.

**Sick-leave Entitlements;** Comvita has recently approved additional sick-leave entitlements. These include waiving the six month stand down for new employees, the ability to apply for discretionary sick leave after an employee's allocated sick leave has been used, and unlimited sick-leave after the accumulation of 25 days.

**Ergonomic Workstation Assessments;** this offer is available to all staff and is initially carried out by an experienced internal staff member. If issues arise during the assessment that cannot be resolved through existing resources specialist advice is sought. Staff based at home are offered ergonomic workstation advice.

**Health Club\* Fund;** all full time employees who have worked for Comvita for more than 6 months are entitled to \$200 a year (part timers are eligible on a pro rata basis) to contribute towards the cost of something relating to the betterment of their health.

**Health Club\* Seminars;** Dr Caroline Davy is Comvita's Marketing Education Manager and is a registered General Practitioner. On a monthly basis Caroline presents a different health topic seminar to staff, often encompassing seasonal advice for healthy living or the benefits and science behind a recently launched Comvita product. Examples of seminars presented to date;

- Respiratory Health
- Joint Health
- The Immune System Family
- Good Fats, Bad Fats
- Heart Health

**Monthly Product Entitlement;** all staff are entitled to \$30 a month worth of Comvita products.

**Seven year club;** staff members who have been employed by Comvita for seven years are entitled to a \$250 gift voucher, are taken out as a group for Christmas dinner annually and are entitled to a one-off week's long service leave.

**Study/training;** Comvita staff wishing to undertake extra-mural study/training have the opportunity to request course fees are covered by Comvita and if approved they are eligible for paid study leave.

**Café; healthy food/meeting place;** in our Visitors Centre/Retail Shop there is a café that serves healthy food choices and is a great alternative location for informal meetings or social gatherings.

### EMPLOYEE PUBLICATIONS



**Wellness Newsletter;** an internal newsletter is written and published monthly by a member of the Wellness Committee, with contributions from all staff. Standard newsletter items include a healthy seasonal recipe, news of wellness events participated in or upcoming, health and safety update, congratulations to staff on achievements, quote of the month and words of wisdom for keeping healthy in the months to follow. Comvita recognise that communication and participation are key criteria for a positive and engaged work force and use the newsletter as an engagement tool.

**Global Buzz;** is Comvita's quarterly newsletter, which incorporates news from and is distributed to staff globally.

## EMPLOYEE EVENTS

**Pilates;** classes are held once a week in the on site auditorium by a fully qualified pilates instructor. Sessions are offered at a corporate rate and further discounted due to the use of the Comvita auditorium. The health club fund (explained below) can be used to obtain a concession membership. The remoteness of Comvita and increased travel time for many poses a challenge when it comes to fitting exercise in. On site pilates classes offer a convenient solution.

**Health Club\* Events;** the Wellness Committee organize events on a regular basis to try and encourage involvement company wide. Past events include Dragon Boat racing, Round Taupo Relay (2 consecutive years), Rotorua Mud Challenge and Redwoods Mountain Biking.

**Family Initiatives;** usually stem from one of the several committees (sustainability, fun & wellness) and in the past have included tree planting days in the community, contributions to birds, bees, kids & trees programme in Kopurererua valley and mountain biking.

**Sports teams;** Comvita has entered teams in the following leagues: volley ball, netball, golf, indoor netball, bowls.

**Annual Table Tennis Tournament;** head office coordinated an inter-departmental table tennis tournament – this has been hugely successful as a team-building exercise, as well as providing fun and exercise in the cold Winter months.

**Big Day out/Big Day off;** specific sales turnover milestones are set and when achieved the whole company are awarded with what started as a 'Big Day Out' - a trip to Rotorua with the optional activities of Rainbow Springs, off-roading or lugging. On another occasion the reward was a paid day off.

**Social club events;** are held at least annually; past events have included a day at the races, pool & dart nights, golfing excursion and a fishing charter trip.

## EMPLOYEE AWARDS

**Health Club Award;** employees self nominate or nominate their peers to be considered for winning \$500 which is awarded annually to the person who has made the biggest improvement to their lifestyle.

**Special Achiever Award;** staff members are able to nominate their colleagues for their special achievement. Examples are providing outstanding service, team contribution or having a positive attitude. This is awarded every 6 months – the prize is a half day off work.

\*The Health Club is a brand name for a series of initiatives implemented by the Wellness Committee but falls under the wider 'Wellness' umbrella.



### **3. Comvita's Commitment to Work-Life Balance**

In January 2006, following a strategic planning workshop, Comvita's Wellness Committee was founded, with the objective of encouraging and assisting Comvita employees to lead a healthy lifestyle. Since then the Wellness Committee, comprising a group of passionate Comvita employees with representatives from all departments in the company, has met monthly to discuss and implement ideas to achieve this objective.

A staff satisfaction survey carried out in mid 2006 highlighted some areas of concern that were caused by the rapid growth of the company. In particular, stress management and time management were raised as symptoms of this growth. The General Management team discussed these issues and Comvita's Life-Work Balance programme (Equilibrium) was developed by the Wellness Committee in response.

The first step in the process was to design a survey, send it out to all staff in New Zealand and find out how people felt about their life-work balance. The survey encouraged suggestions on how the company could make improvements in this area. We were pleased to discover that only 18% of staff members who responded rated the balance between their work and personal commitments as 1 or 2 (poor), with 48% saying they rated their balance at 3 or 4 (average) and 34% rating their balance at 5 or 6 (very good).

The Wellness Committee "brain-stormed" the different areas that could impact on an employee's life-work balance and came up with seven major contributors:

- Organisational culture
- Managing stress in the workplace
- Time management and setting priorities
- Flexible hours
- Supporting the caregiver
- Ergonomic workstations
- Exercise facilities

The Committee members then spent some time researching these areas and came up with ideas to address each of the highlighted areas. Out of this the document "Equilibrium" was born. In early 2007 Equilibrium was presented to Comvita's Executive team to gain their approval and buy-in to the initiatives set out in the document.

### **4. Management Support for Work-Life Balance**

The Chief Executive and Executive team have endorsed the Equilibrium document and approved a budget in the 2008/09 financial year to address stress and time management training for all staff as a first stage.

The Chief Executive is supportive of proposed wellness/sustainability ideas and in the last year has approved two initiatives:

- Additional sick and bereavement leave entitlements (over and above statutory entitlements), as well as the possibility to apply for paid "discretionary" leave once sick/bereavement leave entitlements have run out to cover situations such as prolonged illness or to travel overseas to a family funeral.
- A paid volunteer leave day each year to do charitable work in the community – called "Helping Hands".

There has been a high level of management team participation in Health Club, Social Club and "Helping Hands" events, such as:

- dragon boating (March 2008 in support of breast cancer research);
- company (inter-departmental) table tennis tournament;



- a “Helping Hands” work day at the Otanewainuku Kiwi Trust;
- Valentine’s Day – wear red, bring a healthy lunch to share and make a donation to the Heart Foundation

In May 2008 the Deputy Chief Executive (also a member of the Leadership Team) was nominated by one of his staff members for the Health Club Award for his efforts to improve his fitness and health, as well as promoting life-work balance amongst his team. This is a sign that the senior managers are starting to “walk the talk”.

In 2007 the company’s Performance Review process and checklist was modified to include the following questions. Comvita has a documented process and management commitment to carrying out six monthly performance reviews.

#### *Work/Life Balance*

- Discuss family/out of work commitments and any conflicts with work.*
- Are there any concerns regarding hours being worked, time management, stress management or workstation/work environment?*
- Discuss flexible working opportunities, if appropriate.*

### **5. Employee benefits from Comvita’s support for work-life balance**

**Onsite Pilates classes:** due to the isolated location of our head office and the amount of traveling a high proportion of Comvita employees do to get to and from work, the wellness committee are striving to provide easy, convenient and cost efficient solutions to exercise. One of the first initiatives is onsite pilates classes. We are into our 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of 10 week sessions, and have a group of nine women attending. The following feedback is from some of those women;

- *“In a busy working environment, there are definite benefits of having an on-site Pilates class. These benefits include; no need for additional travel (and therefore greater attendance!), a friendly and fun exercising environment, having the ‘ground work’ of finding a class taken care of for you, being able to try something ‘new’, and best of all, attending a class after a busy days work means driving home feeling relaxed and unwound.”*
- *“Pilates has helped keep my posture in alignment, I normally need to go to the osteopath at least once a month and since starting Pilates I have only needed to go once. Having the classes at 4.30 also gives me a great reason to leave work on time”*

**Flexible working arrangements:** Comvita have a number of staff who benefit from flexible working arrangements, be it for caregiving responsibilities, traveling distances or community commitments. Comvita encourage this as the flexibility in working hours provides a healthy balance between work and out of work commitments, removes the pressure often associated with a stringent working schedule and leads to a more productive, efficient and most importantly happy team. As we are a manufacturing company shift work is an important part of our business but the same flexibility cannot be given as it disrupts the pattern of work. However, after consultation with production and warehouse staff we have come to an extremely successful arrangement. Shifts have moved from 5 x 8hr shifts to 4 x 9hr shifts and a 1/2 day on Friday. This allows staff to get personal errands done, spend time with family and friends and with the added limitation of Comvita’s isolation it was an option that worked for both parties.



Those employees that have requested flexibility have individual arrangements with their manager which works to benefit both themselves and Comvita. Below are several employee testimonials regarding their flexible working arrangements;

- **Full time Customer Services Manager with a daughter & very young grandchild at home**  
*"I think the main thing for me, when I had children at school and now that I have Caitlin at home, is the no questions asked flexi-time. I find that because I am not questioned when I get to the office at 8.45 I am happy to work a bit longer at night. There are times when I find I need to be away from the office for family stuff, but so long as I get my work done, it doesn't seem to matter **when** I do it. In my role I am constantly aware of the consumers' expectation that my phone is answered during business hours and endeavor to ensure this happens whether I am there or not."*
- **Part time Training Education Manager with 2 primary aged children**  
*"My part-time hours and the ability to work from home are for me key to being able to do my job. With 2 primary school-children who also do a heap of after-school activities and a husband who works varying shift work, I have to fit my hours in as best I can. I know that I can definitely always do my hours each week because of this flexibility and certainly makes what could otherwise be very stressful weeks, easily manageable."*
- **Full time General Manager – skincare with 2 primary aged children**  
*"As I need to get my children to school in the morning and I live a 50 minute commute away, I generally don't get in to work until between 9.00 and 9.30am. I counter this by working till 6.00-6.30pm, as my hubby does the school pick up. These hours also help speed my return trip to and from work as it means I generally miss peak hour traffic going both ways.  
I also work one day a week from home. As well as helping by reducing my travel hours, this also means I can sometimes attend a school assembly or sporting event and catch some of those golden moments when I can stand on the sidelines and be a proud mum supporting my children's endeavours.  
In addition, I find that Comvita is very flexible and understanding of the other things that crop up in a working mother's life such as; having to leave early for a teacher/parent interview, working from home because one of my children is off school sick or bringing my child to work for a few hours as I juggle childcare with my husband.  
And finally, my boss is very supportive of keeping a good work life balance by encouraging a regular fitness programme. He has said it's OK if I get in to work later in order to fit a gym work out in!"*
- **Part time Organisational Development Manager with 2 primary aged children.**  
*"The ability to work part time and have flexible start/finish times makes a huge difference to me, as I feel I am able to manage my home life better and therefore not feel so stressed at work. I'm able to drop the children off at school and I believe I am much more focused at work, knowing that I have a day off to do all the things I need to get done, giving me the weekends to spend time with the children. It also means that I can sometimes "swap" my day off for another day so that I can attend school events (eg swimming sports, cross country, school trips) which means a lot to me.  
As I'm also on the school Board of Trustees, I sometimes need some flexibility to attend meetings at school as well. And because I'm set up to work from home, it means that I can catch up in the evenings if I've had to leave work early to pick up children. All in all, for a working mother it's a great arrangement."*
- **Part time Corporate Affairs PR with 1 under 1.**  
*The flexibility of working from home has enabled me to keep my child in her home environment, and with in-home nanny-care I am able to dedicate uninterrupted, productive hours to both Comvita and achieve quality time with my family. Flexible hours were great in the earlier months, I was able to work around breast-feeding and baby sleep times, initially working only 10-15 hours per week, during the day and some evenings. This has now been extended and (importantly) includes one day in the office to attend meetings and catch up with 'the team'.  
Working from home has also given me (and Comvita!) more hours in every day -- saving on daily travel times and it's sustainable too - using less petrol is good for the environment and the wallet!*



- **Full time Warehouse employee with community / school commitments**

I find that having the benefits of being able to use flexible hours when I need them has given me another great drive to work for Comvita. I can attend school activities and sporting events involving my children and the chance to make other appointments during a working week. Knowing that I can make up my hours required so my finances are not affected makes it a stress free environment.

**Health Club Fund:** as mentioned previously full time employees are entitled to \$200 a year to contribute towards the betterment of their health. In the 2007/08 financial year, 47 staff made a claim against their Health Club Fund subsidy. This represents a 43% uptake.

**Health Club Award nominees May 2008:** also mentioned above was the health club award, granted twice a year. The most recent awards were given to the following nominees;

**The Winner:**

Production Operator: Gave up smoking after ten years to provide a healthier environment for herself, her partner and children. She's now feeling more energetic, healthier and happier.

**Runners Up:**

1. Assistant Accountant: Set a goal to do a duathlon in under an hour. She finished in 59 minutes, 18 seconds and came 65 out of 404 women. She is now aiming to do the Taupo Half Marathon in 2 hrs 30 mins.
2. Chief Marketing Officer: Has made an effort to change his lifestyle – goes to the gym regularly, surfs whenever he can, eats healthily and has lost weight, as well as encouraging his team to take time out from their schedule and fit in exercise.

**Seven year club:** as mentioned previously staff members who have been employed by Comvita for seven years or more are recognized and rewarded. We asked members of the seven year club to comment on experience at Comvita;

- "Working here is so easy, most of the people who work for Comvita are not only work mates but great friends."
- "I have been working for Comvita since 1993, I am so passionate about the products and what Comvita stands for. I love it! The people are superb. Also the ability to work from home & anywhere!"
- "I have been with this company for over 12yrs now and still carry the passion torch! I believe in what we are about and where we are going and how we get there. People make up for a large percentage of how well a company performs and given the record of long service here I think we have a good balance of great people and a great company, which surely is a clear indication of having a balanced work/life history. I'm proud to be a part of it."

## **6. Organisational benefits to Comvita from support for work-life balance**

Comvita believes that the company's Wellness philosophy, which includes work-life balance initiatives/policies, is critical to attracting and retaining staff. We are due to run a staff satisfaction survey again at the beginning of August 2008 (the JRA Best Places to Work Survey), so we hope to see an improvement in staff satisfaction results over the survey that was last run two years ago.

25 employees (22% of the New Zealand workforce) have been with Comvita for more than seven years and have therefore joined the Seven Year Club, with one person having just reached her 20 year milestone this year! Comvita has a reputation in the marketplace for being a "good employer". This impression is gained from anecdotal evidence:

- A recruitment agency remarked that when the Comvita logo is placed in a situations vacant advertisement, the applicant response rate increases.
- We regularly receive unsolicited CVs from people wanting to work for Comvita.



## **7. Future plans for supporting Comvita employees' work-life balance**

As mentioned previously, the Wellness Committee set some guiding principles detailed in the Equilibrium document with relation to the seven major contributors to achieve life-work balance. These were; culture, time management, stress management, ergonomics, flexible hours, supporting the caregiver and exercise facilities. This document, although evolving will be referred to by the committee as we continue to implement initiatives that support a healthy balance between work, home and community. One of the focuses over the next year will be to work collaboratively with Comvita's sustainability committee in order to reach some common goals. Some initial ideas include;

- Transport policy, car pooling / travel plans; the sustainability committee are working on developing a transport policy
- Stress & Time management training; this is scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2008, our intention is to provide training of some degree to all staff.
- Initiatives for supporting the caregiver (including those with responsibility for children and elderly or other dependents); such as school holiday programmes, child care support eg. Crèche, discretionary leave.
- Wellness philosophy; further educate the company on the wellness philosophy and its purpose.

In addition to the above objectives, the Wellness Committee would like to set measures over the coming year that better indicate whether we are successful in achieving our objectives. Specific questions in the annual staff survey, incorporating a question into the exit-interview process and having staff satisfaction measures in line with Managers' Balanced Score Cards to ensure they are accountable for the happiness and productivity of their staff are targeted starting points.