

## [155-215] Diversity in the workplace and awards

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*The annual Diversity@Work awards, which recognise, celebrate and promote achievements in diversity and inclusion in the workplace, were awarded at the end of 2008 at a gala event in Melbourne.*

Keynote speaker, Sir Bob Geldof, kept the audience spellbound for over 40 minutes, focusing on the issue of maximising diversity in all forms within the workplace

“Diversity is as critical to man as biodiversity is to nature ... there is no option. Different systems of thought and behaviour add to the dynamism of any company.

“A country can’t grow without using all the cultures, all the talent, all the dynamism of the people of Australia — their abilities, and disabilities,” said Sir Bob Geldof.

### Entries

Over 110 entries were received this year. The judges, all experts in their field, adopted a new process of assessment and review, with all entries being reviewed by KPMG (external review partners for the 2008 awards). The review process helped to assess the integrity of the project or initiative, and incorporated an assessment against agreed matrixes, limited on-site visits and some comprehensive desktop reviews. The judges were encouraged to make true and “real” assessments of the nominations and to assess the programs and strategies based on the following criteria

- quality of the entry
- strategy
- measurement
- communication, and
- impact.

### Awards

Awards were presented in a number of categories to the following organisations:

#### *Mature Age Workers*

- Joint Winner — Astro Alloys (Aust) Pty Ltd (Small to Medium)
- Joint Winner — Adage (Small to Medium)

#### *Recognising Today’s Youth as the Future of Tomorrow*

- Winner — AIESEC Australia (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Swinburne University of Technology (Large)

#### *Employment & Inclusion of Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Intersex*

- Winner — IBM Australia (Large)

#### *Indigenous Australians*

- Winner — Traditional Credit Union (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Australia Post (Large)

### *People with a Disability*

- Winner — Master Instruments (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Peregrine Corporation (Large)

### *Work/Life Balance*

- Winner — ConnectEast (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Sydney Water (Large)

### *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians*

- Winner — Campbell Page (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Brisbane City Council (Large)

### *Women in Leadership*

- Winner — Vedior Asia Pacific (Small to Medium)
- Winner — Sydney Water (Large)

### *Diversity & Inclusion Champion*

- Winner — Traditional Credit Union (Small to Medium)
- Winner — University of Western Australia (Large)
- Winner — Elleni Bereded Samuel, Community Engagement Coordinator, Victoria University (Individual)

## **Diversity initiatives**

“Major awards” were presented as follows:

*The Diversity & Inclusion Champion (Individual):* an award made to an individual who has initiated and championed diversity within their organisation and broader community, was won by Elleni Bereded-Samuel, Victoria University’s community engagement coordinator. Diversity@Work CEO Mark Heaysman said Ms Bereded-Samuel had a long background in improving conditions for people from diverse backgrounds.

“Elleni shows dynamic leadership in creating new solutions for community members to access and participate in the university community and society in general,” Mr Heaysman said.

“In 2005, Elleni was appointed as a Commissioner for Victorian Multicultural Commission and also as Board of Directors of Royal Women’s Hospital and Chairs the Community Advisory Committee.

*Diversity & Inclusion Champion (Organisation):* a new award for organisations that are approaching diversity and inclusion as a broader concept, with strategies that extend across numerous sectors throughout the organisation and the broader community, was won by the University of Western Australia. This was in recognition of strategies to give all people access to employment. University of Western Australia’s Manager, Equity and Diversity, Beverley Hill said “the University recognised the leadership role it could play in maximising opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds”.

“The Workforce Diversity Strategy provides a framework to honour that commitment. It is a vehicle for identifying employment priorities and maximising performance through drawing on the widest possible pool of talent available, thus encouraging workforce diversity.

“The strategy has adopted a mix of initiatives to increase the employment participation of indigenous Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability. This responsive strategy recognises that to be inclusive when inviting people of difference into an established organisation, it is the organisation that needs to change.”

State Water Authority, Sydney Water, won two 2008 Diversity@Work awards in recognition of its commitment to providing workers with a good work/life balance and supporting women in the workplace.

Sydney Water Human Resources Consultant Catherine Ng said Sydney Water’s Women@Work Program was designed to address matters that affect women, ensure employment equity and provide information and development opportunities for women.

“Since introduction of the program in its current format in 2006, Sydney Water has seen many business benefits,” Ms Ng said.

“In a traditionally male dominated business, the program has assisted in a culture shift across the whole organisation. This has seen an increase in the number of women in the organisation and appointment of several women into senior executive positions.”

Sydney Water also offers a range of benefits and conditions that allow staff to balance the demands of work and personal life. The judges noted that Sydney Water has a long history of assisting staff to manage their work/life issues and face challenges that are not common to the more traditional office-based environment. They have concentrated their efforts to provide a broad range of options that will assist the different groups of staff in both CBD and regional locations.

“Some of these initiatives include flexible work arrangements, leave provisions, wellbeing programs and parental services. These initiatives are incorporated into organisational agreements and policies to ensure they are accessible for all staff,” Ms Ng said.

“The success and impact of these initiatives is evidenced by the support they have received and the use by staff. The results from our June 2008 staff survey show how well regarded these programs are with results well above the average.

“The work life balance conditions at Sydney Water are promoted as one of our major attraction factors when recruiting staff and our workforce has a low turnover rate of 4.9%, well below the industry average for utilities of 8.07%.”

It is common for organisations to face difficulties in communicating with all staff about the options available. Sydney Water uses a number of options to overcome these challenges:

- A weekly electronic newsletter that is sent to all staff advising them of any new or revised policies relating to work/life balance.
- A *Staff Benefits* publication that promotes the available services and options to all staff, including flexible work arrangements.
- Team Talk — a monthly document forwarded to senior managers — so as to inform them and their staff about new work/life initiatives and policies.
- A dedicated “Ask HR” email address and phone number which staff can use to contact HR with any queries they may have about work/life balance options.

The fact that Sydney Water was able to demonstrate the business benefits of its initiatives, the links with the organisation’s business goals and the breadth of the options available indicated to the judges of this category that the initiatives were making a real difference.

Adage, a careers centre and job board for mature age professionals, was joint winner of the mature age category for small and medium businesses. It won the award in recognition of a commitment to employing

mature age workers. Adage Director Jodi Stanton said Adage.com.au connected job seekers directly with organisations which value maturity and experience.

“The core objective of Adage is to enhance labour force participation of mature workers in Australia, improve the job search experience and educate employers about the changing workforce demography and business benefits of improved age balance in their organisations.

“Adage sought and was granted an exemption under Section 126 of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1997, to allow the advertisement of positions targeting mature age job seekers only, and to screen registrations for Adage on the basis of age (40+).

“The submission included evidence of age bias in the employment market and barriers to job search for mature job seekers. Adage was seen as a positive way to bridge the gap for mature workers seeking an ‘age positive’ employer, moving from full time to flexi work, or re-entering the workforce after an absence.”

## **Conclusion**

Summarising the success of the Diversity@Work Awards CEO Mark Heaysman said employers across Australia had to do more to give people with disabilities and from diverse backgrounds a fair go. These awards recognised businesses which were making a real difference.

“It is disappointing that many businesses across Australia still do not focus on giving women a fair go. These awards show what is possible and should be an example for others.

“There’s no reason Australia shouldn’t be the world leader when it comes to workplace diversity. We have a wide population of young people, indigenous workers, mature-aged workers, and people with disabilities and from diverse backgrounds, as well as return to work parents.

“These awards are a reminder to every organisation throughout the country to step up.”