Wine Australia

AUSTRALIAN Grape & Wine

Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit

CASE STUDY

Flexible work in a medium-sized, geographically dispersed business

Andrew Higgins, Chief Winemaker, Tamburlaine, NSW

It's not gender driven… it's about achieving better work-life balance for everyone.

Implementing flexible work is an evolving process to try to get the work-life balance happening effectively for everyone. People have different demands or requirements. As people's family life and situation changes, they'll be looking for more flexible work arrangements.

It's important to have good relationships with your staff, have open communication and make it clear that your staff know they can talk to you about their lives. Most of the time people are a little bit nervous and feel vulnerable having those discussions. As long as we're planning, supporting our staff, the business is getting the outcomes, and the work gets done. Things work out.

One of our winemakers has a young family so he's on a nine-day fortnight and two days a week he comes in a bit later. That arrangement is formalised in his work agreement for the non-harvest period. Once or twice a week, I leave early to pick up the kids from school to get the family balance right.

Philosophy: planning and training

We're not talking about leaps; we're just talking about steps.

It's also about managing the seasonal peaks. The harvest period is usually a three-month duration, and we're interested in how we pay back during the rest of the year. The business encourages time off in lieu to give back during the less intense periods.

We don't package during harvest, and we typically work the packaging season on a nine-day fortnight. From an hourly perspective, we go from a 10-day fortnight to a nine-day fortnight, so we only have to work an extra 10% to get that equivalent day off. That's easy to do in a fortnight. We only have to fill the gap for that person one day a fortnight and that's achievable. It will be interesting to see, once we get the rigour and the balance of achieving that continuous nine-day fortnight right, how many of the staff we can release to have that tenth day off.



We offer our trainee winemakers exposure to all parts of the winery – working in the cellar, grape crushing, dragging hoses, vintage, packaging, the bottling line, working in the lab. They have opportunities to build their skill base and understand various aspects of the winery before stepping into full time winemaking roles. It develops their career pathway but also helps with flexible work across the business.

We rely on full time staff to step into seasonal supervisory roles as shift or area supervisors when we bring in 50% more staff during harvest and vintage. Supervisory roles are also available when staff go on leave. They get short-term experience, growth and renumeration.

Business benefits and challenges

Flexibility builds loyalty.

When you find the right person, they might be awesome, but they might not be able to work full time at first. It is worth being flexible to get those people. Good staff make things so much easier. Keeping staff happy means they keep you happy and work is enjoyable.

The biggest challenge is to communicate with staff and upper management that outcomes will be achieved and results driven. and to plan how that will work. The way to do that is to negotiate on a case-by-case basis to deal with the specific challenges of each department. This involves scheduling so the team can work safely, unsupervised and productively in those time periods. If you plan well, it's achievable.