Wine Australia

AUSTRALIAN Grape & Wine

Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit

CASE STUDY

Managing flexible work and family – starting with organisational culture

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No matter the size of your business, a commitment to supporting your team is what makes flexible working possible.

Many of our staff have children and family commitments — which also includes other types of caring. We have an open-minded workplace – everyone understands the challenges of juggling life outside of work, and that helps us when we need to have conversations about flexibility with the work and our roles.

One aspect of offering flexibility is about adjusting practical details like start and finish times — starting work after doing the morning school run might mean working an hour later. We're all dedicated to doing good work, so this isn't a concern.

The other aspect of flexibility is thinking differently about careers. With very young kids, vintage needs to look different. For us, that means allowing employees who are parents to consider the value of working in other roles in the business during that period that don't need 24/7 oversight. It can mean building expertise and experience in marketing, sales or other corporate roles for those early years of your family. I'm a winemaker first, but that capacity to switch hats is invaluable.

Doing flexibility successfully is about looking for opportunities to upskill and support your people. Some of these steps are easier in bigger businesses, but smaller wineries should also consider who might be keen to act in a role while someone else is on parental leave or working different hours – those opportunities are important to use creatively in your team.

I see some great possibilities for the industry to support smaller wineries – through grants that provide coverage through parental leave periods, or through connecting our university students with these wineries to cover work while gaining experience.

Being open-minded about how to manage work-life balance is also key to retaining those skilled workers in your team throughout any of their own life changes. It means you can show you're investing in career development in more flexible ways, which is important for future leaders.



Investing in your organisational culture and building trust

Taking the time to build teams with a shared understanding of how you work together is important.

We put our whole team through Brené Brown's 'Dare to Lead' training, and it has given us a whole new language to use — one we all share. Rather than just one or two 'leaders' getting this training, ensuring everyone understands the approach gives us a foundation from which we can make those cultural changes. Everyone feels part of it, and we have an approach to deal with difficult conversations.

Even (and maybe especially) in family-run wineries, communication is important across teams. We are part of the Great Place to Work program and feedback from the cross-company survey each year shows this investment in communication skills has had a positive impact.

It's about putting your hand up and saying, 'Can we be flexible on this?' Of course, everyone needs to be flexible. That's how places move forward.