

BANK OF NZ CASE STUDY

CHALLENGE

The Bank of New Zealand (BNZ) strives to be known as an employer who values diversity and is committed to helping individuals from all walks of life to realise their own potential. However, highly capable professionals with a quieter style have been 'slipping under the radar'.

Jessica Xu, Leadership and Talent Lead at BNZ, says:

"When we conducted a review in 2020 to understand what supported or prevented the progression and retention of women leaders at BNZ, we uncovered a perception that to succeed and to get ahead, one needs to fit a particular mold – be loud, dominating, the traditional 'alpha' type personality. We want to combat that perception and support our talent and leaders of all styles to be successful at BNZ. We have many highly capable leaders and professionals with a quieter style. This talent often slips under the radar and we want to support them to harness their strengths, and help them amplify their presence and impact without feeling like they needed to adopt a different style."

This perception that quieter professionals felt the need to behave in a louder, more dominant manner, echoes the findings from Quietly Powerful research surveys.

Our research found that 86% of quieter professionals who were surveyed stated that they often or sometimes feel like they have to be extroverted to progress in their careers. 93% of them stated that they often or sometimes feel like people underestimate what they are capable of. (Quietly Powerful Leadership Seminar Series Surveys, 2016/17)

THE APPROACH

Quietly Powerful has worked with BNZ for over 2 years, with BNZ initially sending 4 senior managers on the Quietly Powerful Public Program, to see whether it could be helpful. After positive feedback from participants, the program has been tailored to meet BNZ's specific needs, including support and mentorship from Quietly Powerful senior leaders within the organisation.

BNZ initially implemented this program to support the progression of women who believed they didn't fit the traditional mould of alpha-style leaders. However, it became evident that there were also male leaders and people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who resonated with the same struggles. The Quietly Powerful program was therefore expanded as a broader talent development solution.

Participants have been selected from a cohort of employees that management have identified as having high leadership potential along with a quieter style, or existing leaders who needed some strategies to help bring out their full potential being a quiet leader. 2 cohorts of 8-9 participants undertook the program in 2021 and feedback indicated that the program was beneficial at both an individual and an organisational level. A further 2 cohorts participated in the program in 2022.

The program, which is ongoing, adopts a blended learning approach including:

- A kick-off session with the participants and leaders of the participants, which outlines core concepts and how the leaders can best support their team members in their development;
- Self-directed online learning;
- Facet5 profiling tool to help the participants gain self-awareness of their own traits and styles;
- Virtual live group coaching sessions with Megumi Miki;
- Experiments and activities to apply the learnings in between live coaching sessions;
- Q&A sessions with BNZ's own Quietly Powerful leaders;
- A 1:1 coaching session with Megumi for each participant; and
- Ongoing access to a wide range of learning resources after the formal program, along with invitations to twice-yearly alumni gatherings.

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THE OUTCOME

BNZ's recent analysis of the program impact has found that when compared with a general talent population who haven't yet been on this program, people who have been on the program have an increased rate of progression within the organisation, and a decreased rate of attrition.

Not only are individual participants reporting personal benefits from the program, but the fact that BNZ is investing in developing quieter talent is sending a message that BNZ values diversity of thought and styles and is committed to helping individuals from all walks of life to realise their own potential.

One participant was featured in BNZ's internal newsletter, and she reported that many quieter people thanked her for sharing her story, and expressed how positive it was to hear that BNZ values different leadership styles.

Individual feedback shows that participants have reported a number of benefits from the experience, such as:

- Greater self-awareness that enables them to use their natural styles effectively and adapt when needed.
- Building greater confidence in their own leadership potential, skills to handle their self-doubt, and an increased willingness to tackle new opportunities.
- Enhanced ability to speak up in meetings, influence and have impact, manage difficult conversations, and to speak publicly.
- Achieving workplace promotions, taking on new, stretch opportunities and receiving awards.

Many of the participants have been women and people from ethnically diverse backgrounds, even though the program is not exclusively targeted in this way. This is likely to be because these people can be quieter not only due to their personality but also due to certain values and social norms that are core to the cultures they grew up in and because they are generally in a minority within the workplace. In this way, the program is supporting diversity and inclusion objectives, as well as leadership talent development.

We are continuing to work with BNZ to review and enhance the overall program, with further thinking on how to engage and educate a broader group of leaders to appreciate different styles of leadership, as well as expanding the reach to more junior members with high capability and potential.

Would you also like to ensure your organisation is utilising its full range of talent – including hidden, future Quietly Powerful Leaders?

Explore how Quietly Powerful can help your organisation today.

Get In Touch

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